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SPINACH7

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Arlene TeXTaQueen

Felt-tip Femme Fatale

Damien Kingsbury
A Future for Democracy in Indonesia?

John Rumbiak
Speaks out about the Freeport Ambush in West Papua

Jacqui Katona
On Aboriginal Leadership post-ATSIC

PLUS

Miss Galaxy Tonga-Style &

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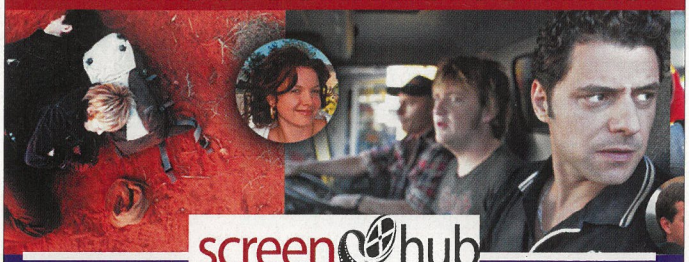

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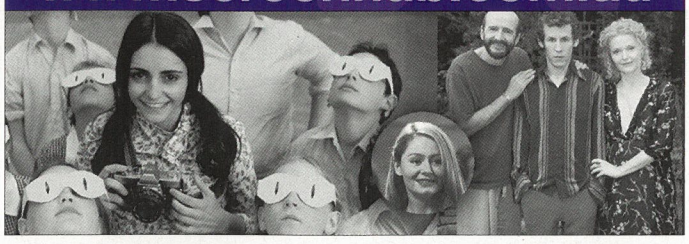
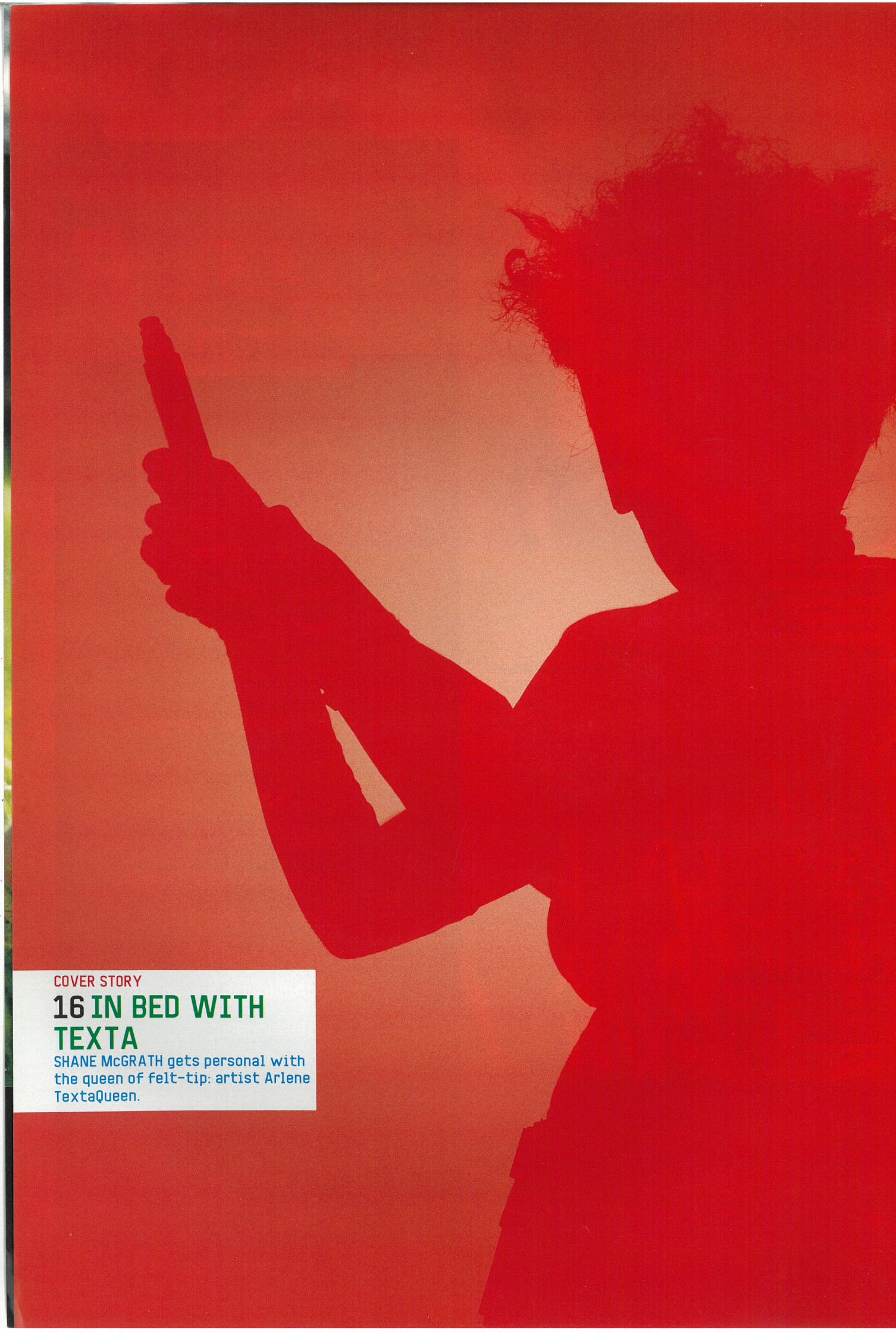
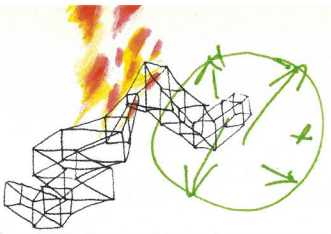




COVER STORY

16 IN BED WITH TEXTA

SHANE McGRATH gets personal with the queen of felt-tip: artist Arlene TextaQueen.



SHORTS

5–14 YEAH, RIGHT... HOW TO... WHAT'S ON? PROFILE & ASIA PACIFIC BRIEFS

FEATURE

22 'HARDLINE' OR HARD-HEARTED?

In 1998 the Federal Government decided to get 'tough on drugs'. ESTHER SINGER assesses the health and social impacts six years on.

COMMENTARY

28 INDONESIA'S FESTIVAL OF DEMOCRACY

Indonesia may have gone to the polls on July 5 in the country's first democratic presidential elections, but the former dictatorship is still on a long road to democracy, writes DAMIEN KINGSBURY.

INTERVIEW

32 CASE CLOSED?

MARNI CORDELL speaks to West Papuan investigator John Rumbiak about controversial developments in the Freeport ambush case.

PHOTOGRAPHY

37 SAVAGE PEACE

Photographer RUSTY STEWART's moving images from Israel and the Occupied Territories.

PERSONAL

42 LIKE A PAINTBOX

Writer and teacher TONY BIRCH reflects on death, as a part of life.

VIEWS & REVIEWS

46 BOOKS

Regular columnist CATFORD COLES on creativity and constraint.

48 MUSIC

DAN RULE talks to southern Saharan blues band Tinariwen.

52 DIGITAL MEDIA

Behind the scenes in the games-funding game.

54 FILM

Stop-motion maverick Wladislaw Starewicz.

56 VISUAL ARTS

In an artist-run space above a pub LUCAS IHLEIN discovers *Splint*, a hand-made tool-kit without instructions for use.

COMIC

58 RIGHT OF WAY

GREGORY MACKAY

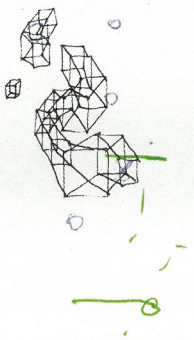
TRAVEL

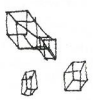
61 MISS GALAXY, TONGA

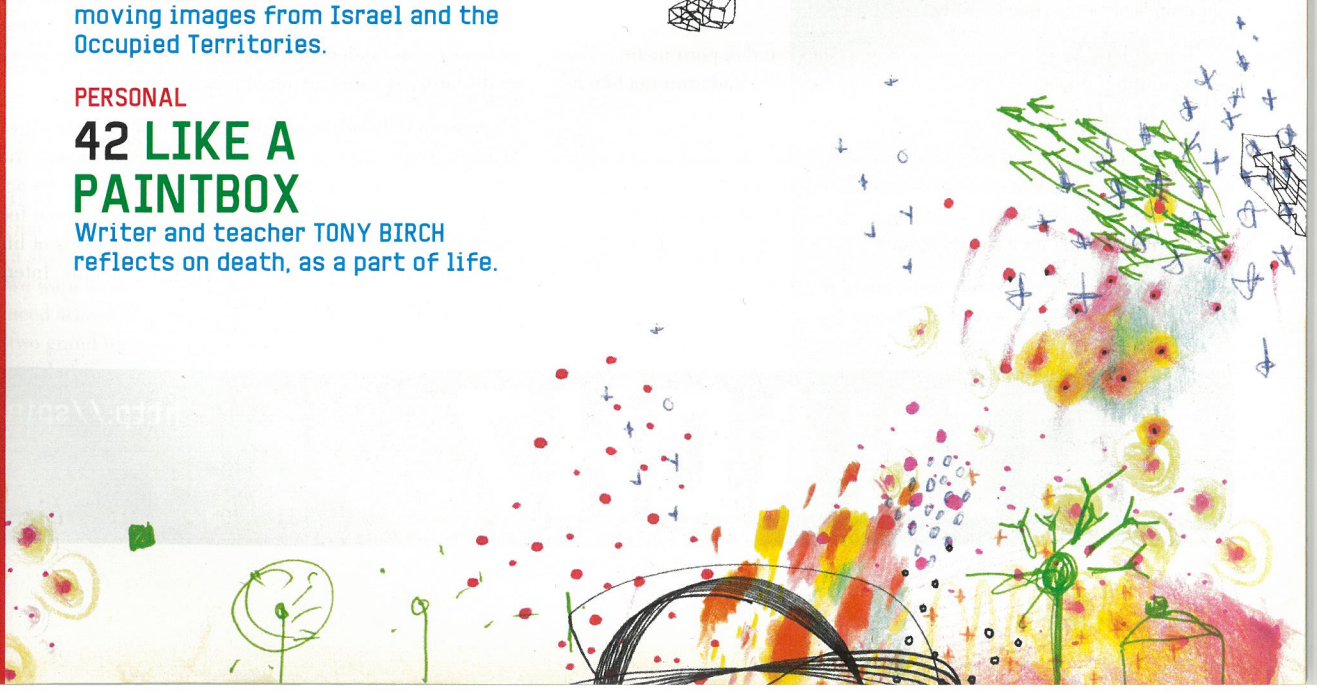
A transvestite beauty pageant is one of the most popular annual events on the Tongan calendar. MIRANDA TETLOW with all the goss and glitter.

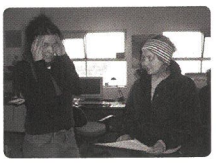
64 THE LAST WORD

Jacqui Katona on Aboriginal leadership in the wake of ATSIC's dismantling.









FROM THE EDITORS

It looks like Merlin from *Big Brother* has sparked up that old media debate again: do young people care about politics? I don't normally advocate the idea of a 'generational divide' - I believe in ideological divides, but find that they very rarely fall along generational lines. But with a recent rush of media commentators going in for the kill, I feel the need to talk for a moment from under this banner of 'young person' to comment on our supposed 'political apathy'.

Let's take a look at those firing the accusations: when many of these people were at their most dynamic - in the 1960s and 70s - there was a common and certain aim: the end of the Vietnam war.

Now, the war that is invading our world is much more insidious; we are acting in much less politically certain times. As such, our response to that war as a generation of young people is much more varied, subtle, cynical and creative.

Yet because many of us are not interested in expressing ourselves through established forums, Baby Boomers feel they have the authority to assume we are not politically engaged - without appreciating that many of those forums do not actually cater to us, or for us.

When Merlin came out with his 'free th refugees' sign, the established media pounced on him as a representative of what they've patronisingly dubbed 'generation BB' (*Big Brother*). I'm not interested in Merlin as a mascot for my generation's political nous, but I am interested in the way the dominant media dealt with his stand - and what that says about the space that is allowed to young people to express their political views.

In some outlets, the reaction was clearly: "there's a time and a place for everything!" and prime time TV is neither the time nor the place for political statements. The gesture was shunned so forcefully by the Ten Network that I was embarrassed for them. That they felt the need in this day and age - when personal and political have merged so profoundly - to pretend that a public expression of one's views is somehow morally inappropriate, was cringe-worthy.

In other outlets, Merlin was admonished as naive and opportunistic. "The BB generation *does* care!" they cried, while carefully undermining him as adolescent and uninformed.

Perhaps he was merely using the only medium available to him to make a statement to a large amount of people. The fact that this medium happens to be reality TV is - I agree - pretty sad. So maybe it's time the gatekeepers opened up a few more gates.

On that note! I hope you enjoy this edition. MARNI

Cloaked hostages, the Abu Ghraib photo files: stories and images about calculated processes that dehumanise have been big this year. People have *expressed* disgust, shock and upset, but these stories do not point to any obvious personal *action* to take in response. How can we translate 'abhorrence' into a principle or value that spans the distances these images are constructed to create? For those of us well-schooled in cynicism and analysis, emotional responses can take longer to rise, are less clear as guides, are harder 'positions' to hold in an argument.

It's in this context that this edition insists on the value of everyday human relations.

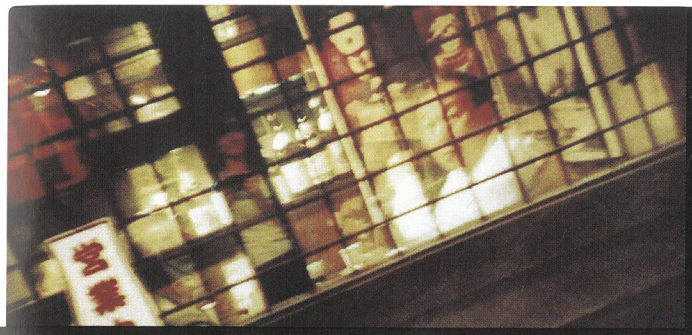
In our cover story Arelene TextaQueen talks to a close mate, Shane McGrath. She describes an intimate creative process: talking and drawing in the bedrooms of people she knows and respects - friends. This is not to say that Texta's work is about 'jobs for the girls', rather that through conversation, a connection is deepened, or even found. Texta both likes to draw her friends and forms friendships through drawing. And our story mirrors this process, Shane and Texta talk at the kitchen table as Shane writes.

Tony Birch, writer and teacher, remembers his godmother's death, which is both distant and immediate. Tony writes of an ongoing relationship with the dead in his life, as a way of reminding him to act with a responsibility that stretches beyond the relentless 'now'. "Those people have informed all that I am," he says, and this is true too of all relations as they shift, dissipate and evolve.

Our feature story, *'Hardline' or Hard-Hearted?* also invites consideration of relations at a broader level of society. Esther Singer investigates the implications of the Federal Government's Tough on Drugs strategy and talks to those it directly affects - illicit drug users. Esther engages the voices of users in the policy and advocacy arena, all too often left out or trivialised within discussion. From a health and social perspective it's clear this community is being "kicked when it's down". I'd like to think this article will prompt readers to examine their assumptions about illicit drug use; to employ compassion as a better basis for their interactions with users; and indeed disband the neat separation between 'society' and its discards, as users are often perceived.

It seems crazily blithe to editorialise about "sets of relations". But *SPINACH7* is about, in part, making humane media. And it's no small task to live humanely, to seek out the human-ness in each other. Perhaps the first thing we can do in response to big issues that feel beyond our control is to ensure that we pay attention to aspects of life that are within our control: the everyday, the minutiae, the details. Interactions and relationships. Enjoy the edition. EVE

SPINACH7 DIGITAL http://spinach7.com



Compiled by TIMOTHY MOORE and EVE VINCENT

Yeah, Right...

DON'T THINK, JUST SHOOT

Click, Click. The sounds of the camera shutter introduce... Lomo: an international society of "photo-adventurers" obsessed with the small Russian Lomo Kompakt Automat camera.

There are an estimated two hundred thousand plus Lomographers traversing the globe. Their aim? To study and document the world's surface with the Lomo brand of camera. Lomographers are encouraged to take part in the Lomoolympics and invited to stop by the Lomoembassy in Hong Kong to restock on camera equipment, or maybe accept their latest Lomomission at Lomography headquarters.

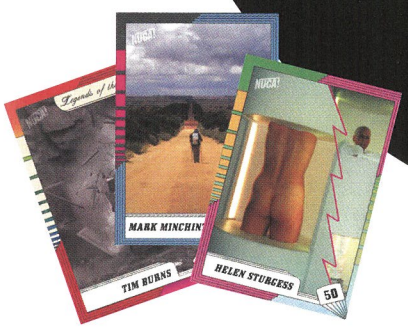
Above all Lomographers endeavour to observe the 10 golden rules of Lomo, which include: take your camera everywhere; use it anytime; shoot from the hip; be fast; and lastly, don't worry about any rules.

Don't think, you lomo, just shoot.

Lomo Headquarters http://www.lomography.com
Lomo Embassy Australia http://www.lomoaustralia.com
Lomo Embassy Hong Kong http://www.lomography.com.hk

Lomo Home, Georgina Nebe
http://www.lomohomes.com/georgiegrrl69

PHOTOS: GEORGINA NEBE



UNCOLLECTABLE PRIZE POOL

The somewhat anachronistic collector cards created by the Network of Uncollectable Artists (NUCA) were a hit at this year's *Next Wave Festival* and beyond. The 50 bubblegum cards feature the work of artists who tend towards the ephemeral, obsessive, temporary, cunning and iconoclastic. At Melbourne and Sydney swap-meets, feverish pundits have been trading their way to a full set, a task made more difficult by NUCA's admission that "some cards are harder to get than others".

It turns out that networking unprofitable creative projects has produced... profits. Card sales have generated a prize pool, and NUCA now invites artists to apply for a share: $2000 is up for grabs. NUCA spokesperson LUCA explains: "We want to roll some cash over to new uncollectable art projects. So if you need 40 cents for a box of matches, $540.30 to get an animal trained, or two grand for your helicopter licence, get in touch and we'll see what we can do for you!"

Send in whatever 'documents' best support your case, tell NUCA why you need the cash and how you plan to spend it. Entries close September 1.

http://www.uncollectables.net, info@uncollectables.net
PO Box 391 Newtown, NSW 2042

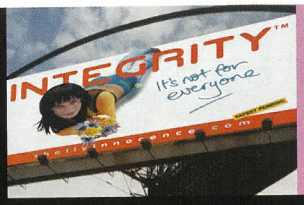
ARCHITECTS WITHOUT FRONTIERS

Heroic tales of Chinese city master-plans and Shanghai skyscrapers dominate the Australasian architectural world. It's no wonder then that news hasn't spread of the rubbish pit constructed in the village of Pangkarma on the Mount Everest trek in Nepal. Facilitated by the Australian branch of Architects Without Frontiers (AWF), the Nepalese community designed and constructed two rubbish pits so they could stop disposing of their household garbage in an adjacent river, all for a cool $3000. More pits are planned.

Closer to home, a current AWF project on North Stradbroke Island involves building a toilet and washing facilities for a fella on the Gurumpul community. I'd like to see design mags run a glossy spread on this project. Really.

http://www.architectswithoutfrontiers.com.au

Yeah, Right...



SHELLYINNOCENCE

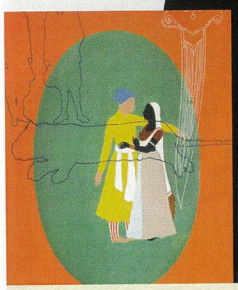
Shellyinnocence is a series of billboards that tread the fine line between art and advertising; in this recent project, publicity is the artwork.

The face of the campaign is high-achieving 'Shelly' (supermodel, in-store demonstrator and Commonwealth games athlete). Shellyinnocence markets human potential to the masses announcing the arrival of Happiness™, Integrity™, Risk™ and Insight™. And if this ain't enough, upsize with Innocence™ because "You don't want to know".

But beneath the gloss of glamorous Shellyinnocence, this discerning eye couldn't help but notice that Shelly is not dressed by hi-end Susan Cianciolo or high street Sportsgirl. Instead, she opts for local thrift store Savers.

Shelly is not the brand image she calls you up to be. So, what happens when you discover that marketing dreams can turn into a great disappointment? What happens if you try to return Happiness™ to the store when you're no longer satisfied? What happens when you try to sell nothing?

http://www.shellyinnocence.com



SOUTH

Writers, artists, curators, map-obsessed theorists and traditional string makers were among those that converged at *South 1: The Gathering* in Melbourne in early July. The conference marked a beginning of a five-year program that aims to "develop networks for cultural exchange between countries of the south". Participants from southern Africa, Australia, the Pacific and Latin America came together to talk up, and listen to, what's going on in our latitude.

http://www.southproject.org

BLACK PARADISE

Spirit of Mambesek is the upcoming release from West Papuan music group, Black Paradise. Recorded during Black Paradise's visit to Australia for the Morning Star Concert for West Papua, the result is a multi-lingual and multi-layered CD. Part document — of a rich, distinctive and joy-filled living culture — and part testament and contribution to the ongoing struggle for independence from Indonesian rule *Spirit of Mambesek* entertains and rouses.

http:// www.mana.com.au/blackparadise

PLOG

Politics getting you down? Can't get an election? Then, it's time to reconnect with your political voice.

The political blog, affectionately tagged the 'plog', allows for a number of alternative commentaries, from disenchanted public servants to previously silenced refugees.

Unlike US Democrat Howard Dean in the presidential candidacy contest last year, Mark Latham and John Howard have not decided to log their own electoral plod. However, some have taken it upon themselves to spread some fear and good cheer in their place.

This is the ploggish Howard in April:
"Mark totally nicked a speech from some American president who wasn't George Bush. What a loser. I come up with my own totally original ideas. Like visiting troops in Iraq on an important day for a rad press stunt. And outlawing gay marriage. I'm a total visionary."

Meanwhile plog Latham, unsettled by Peter Garrett's resemblance to a moray eel: "had a gabfest and some brekky this morning with the party faithful. I wolfed back my share pronto, because I was worried Garrett's fugly bonce might just dart out from nowhere and snatch it from my hand."

If you can't take anymore nonsense from Australian politics, then check in with the techno-savvy Helen Clark across the Tasman. Make sure you click on her free stuff section complete with e-cards and bumper stickers that are taking it to the Kiwi kids.

John Howard http://johnhoward.blogspot.com
Mark Latham http://markl.tblog.com/

Helen Clark http://www.labour.org.nz/labour_team/helen_clark/weblog/index.html

HOW TO... Make Mojitos

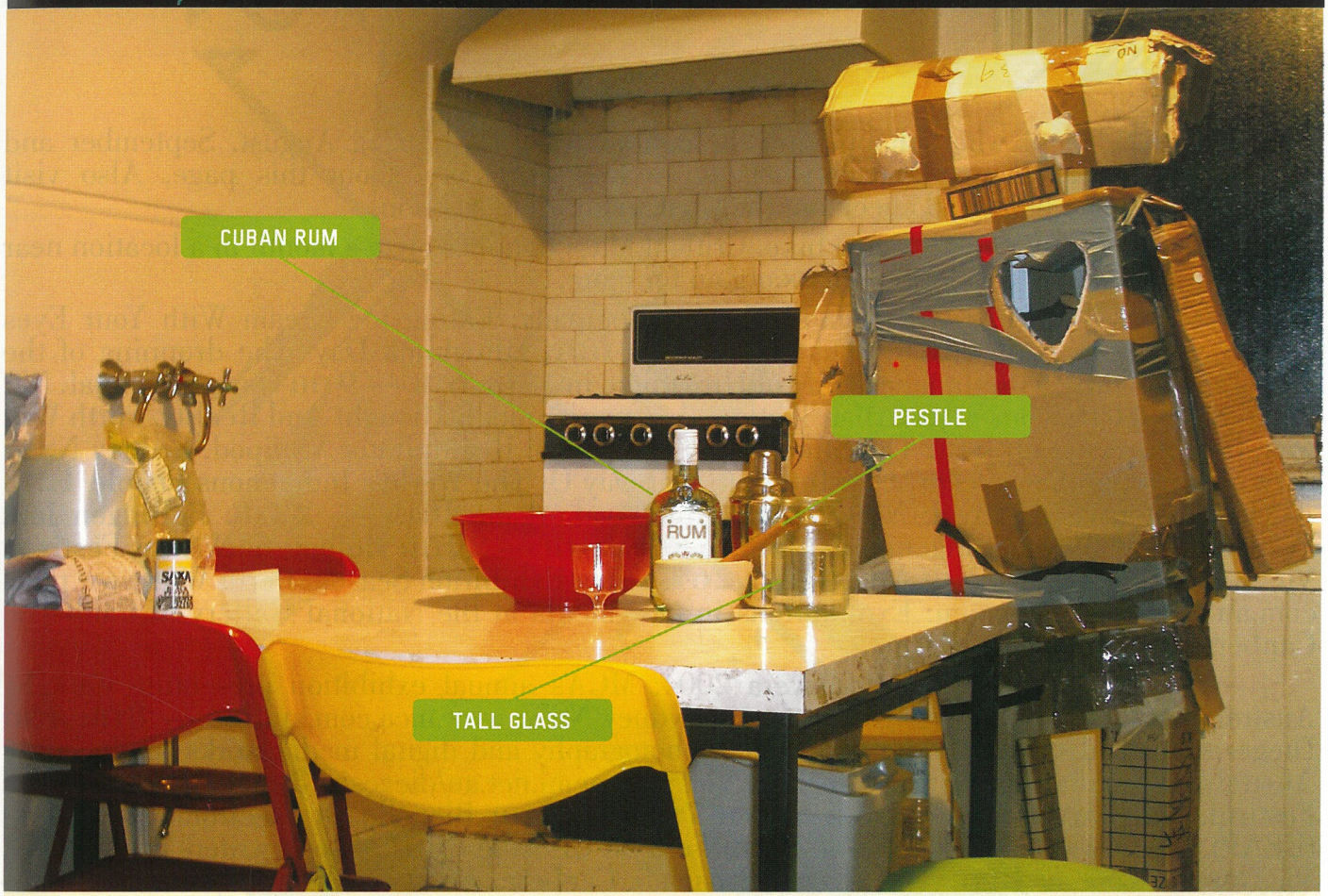


PHOTO: TINGED

(with Randal the Robot)

The mojito (pronounced mo-he-toe) is easy to make — which is good, because they seem to get stronger as the night goes on, making complex tasks a bit difficult.

First, get to Cuba, and buy some white rum.

The average flight to Cuba costs around $3000, depending on the season. The rum only costs about $8 for a 750ml bottle though, so it kind of evens out in the end.

You will also need limes, sugar, fresh mint, club soda and ice. You can get these locally (although if you're in Cuba anyway, you might try to grab some of the ingredients there to save yourself time later on. There are shortages in Cuba, but don't let that deter you.)

If you don't make it to Cuba, get your hands on some rum here.

Get a tall glass (or, if you live in my house, a large glass jar).

Put in a tablespoon of sugar, some chopped fresh mint, the juice of half a lime and some of the lime peel.

Mash it all together with one of those masher-thingies from a mortar and pestle set. (I guess you call it a pestle.)

Add one shot of white rum, some ice, and top it up with club soda, then stir with a long spoon. The soda is important — it not only gives you a full glass of summery Cuban goodness, the soda plays an integral role in getting drunk.

A brief *Curiosity Show* moment:

Contrary to popular opinion, food doesn't absorb alcohol, because you don't absorb alcohol through your stomach lining. Absorption takes place in the intestine — the stomach just prepares food for absorption. There is a valve at the entrance to the intestine in the stomach that regulates the movement of materials from one to the other. Food slows the passage of material into the intestine by closing the valve. Carbonated drinks work to speed up the passage of materials. They're not exactly sure how this happens, but the current theory is that the gas puts pressure on the valve, forcing it open (and fast-tracking the alcohol into the blood-stream).

So don't skimp on the soda.

Todo bien!

NIK BEURET

WHAT'S ON?

Here's a snapshot of what's happening throughout Australia during August, September and October. Visit http://spinach7.com/whatson/ to find out more about this page. Also visit http://theprogram.net.au and check out the what:when:where section.

Don't forget, if you are into riding a bike, Critical Mass happens once a month in a location near you. Check out http://www.criticalmass.org.au for more.

August: 2ND — 28TH: Queensland Theatre Company: Eating Ice Cream With Your Eyes Closed. Brisbane Qld: www.qldtheatreco.com.au **6TH:** Hiroshima Day: The dropping of the first atomic bomb on the Japanese city of Hiroshima in 1945. **6TH — 9TH:** Garma Festival. NT: www.garma.telstra.com **7TH:** Urban Truth: A Journey Through Thought And Reality. Perth WA: www.propelarts.org.au **8TH:** The Studio Music Sessions: Regurgitator Vs Spod. Sydney NSW: www.sydneyoperahouse.com **9TH:** International Day Of The World's Indigenous People **12TH — 19TH:** Darwin Festival: NT: www.darwinfestival.org.au **20TH — 22ND:** Bellingen Jazz Festival. NSW: www.bellingenjazzfestival.com.au **20TH — 29TH:** Melbourne Writers Festival. Vic: www.mwf.com.au **26TH AUG — SEP 26TH:** Pica Exhibition Season. Perth WA: www.pica.com.au **28TH:** Full Screen: Explorations in new media at the National Gallery of Canberra. Canberra ACT: www.nga.gov.au

September: 2ND — 14TH: Primavera 2004: MCA's annual exhibition presenting work by Australian artists 35 years of age and under. Sydney NSW: www.mca.com.au **3RD — 8TH:** Atari Diegesis Festival: Showcase for film, video, photography and digital media works produced by Australian secondary students. Melbourne Vic: www.acmi.net.au/diegesis/ **3RD — 2ND:** Brisbane Festival. Qld: www.brisbanefestival.com.au **7TH — 17TH:** Bienelle Of Electronic Arts Perth (BEAP). WA: www.beap.org **7TH — 30TH:** Festival Of Song: PBS FM song writers competition. Vic: www.pbs.org.au **11TH — 7TH:** Headspace 5. Canberra ACT: www.portrait.gov.au **22ND — 10TH:** Melbourne Fringe. Vic: www.melbournefringe.com.au **24TH — 14TH:** Coffs Harbour International Buskers Festival. NSW: www.coffsharbourbuskers.com **27TH — 3RD:** Brisbane Writers Festival. Qld: www.brisbanewritersfestival.com.au **30TH SEP — 4TH:** This Is Not Art Festival: Including electrofringe, sound summit, young writers festival, student media conference and critical animals. Newcastle NSW: www.thisisnotart.org

October: 9TH — 25TH: Melbourne International Arts Festival. Vic: www.melbournefestival.com.au **10TH:** World Mental Health Day **15TH — 30TH:** Artrage Festival. Perth, Swan, Freemantle WA: www.artrage.com.au **16TH — 17TH:** Two Rivers Festival. Gunnedah NSW. www.infogunnedah.com.au **28TH OCT — 14TH NOV:** Sculpture By The Sea: Australia's largest annual outdoor exhibition of contemporary sculpture. Sydney NSW: www.sculpturebythesea.com

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YOUNG (NSW) **98.7FM**

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NEXT WAVE

2005 Next Wave Kickstart

Sometimes it's hard to get things started. A great idea isn't always enough to get an arts project off the ground. Next Wave has more than 18 years experience in helping young artists develop their project, from the first sketches of an idea through to a polished and successful outcome.

The help we provide covers all aspects of your project, from budgeting, seeking funding and sponsorship, sourcing venues and materials through to matching you up with experienced arts practitioners who have been through it all before. We even give you cold hard cash.

You might call it the chance you've always needed. We call it Kickstart.

2005 Next Wave Kickstart launches October this year. Stay tuned to **www.nextwave.org.au** for information on eligibility and application forms.

PROFILE

Pheona Donohoe

PHOTO: JACQUI BROWN

A former drummer in a riot-grrrl band, PHEONA DONOHOE is currently working in a music store in Chadstone Shopping Centre — the Melbourne suburban 'mega-plex'. Chadstone is ambitiously branded; every time Pheona gets on the store's loudspeaker she has to say the shop name, followed by "fashion capital!".

This time last year Pheona was hanging out far from Chadstone: in El Paso, Texas. Downtown El Paso sits at the foot of a mountain range and the city sprawls to either side. Across a dry riverbed lies Juarez, Mexico; a bridge over the border links these places.

While in El Paso, a friend invited Pheona to her parents' house, where she soon became a regular: "Her mother Sylvia would teach me bits of Spanish and how to cook real Mexican food. She also took me across the border to Juarez, where her mother — my friend's grandmother — still lives."

From Sylvia, Pheona learnt about the murdered and missing women of Juarez.

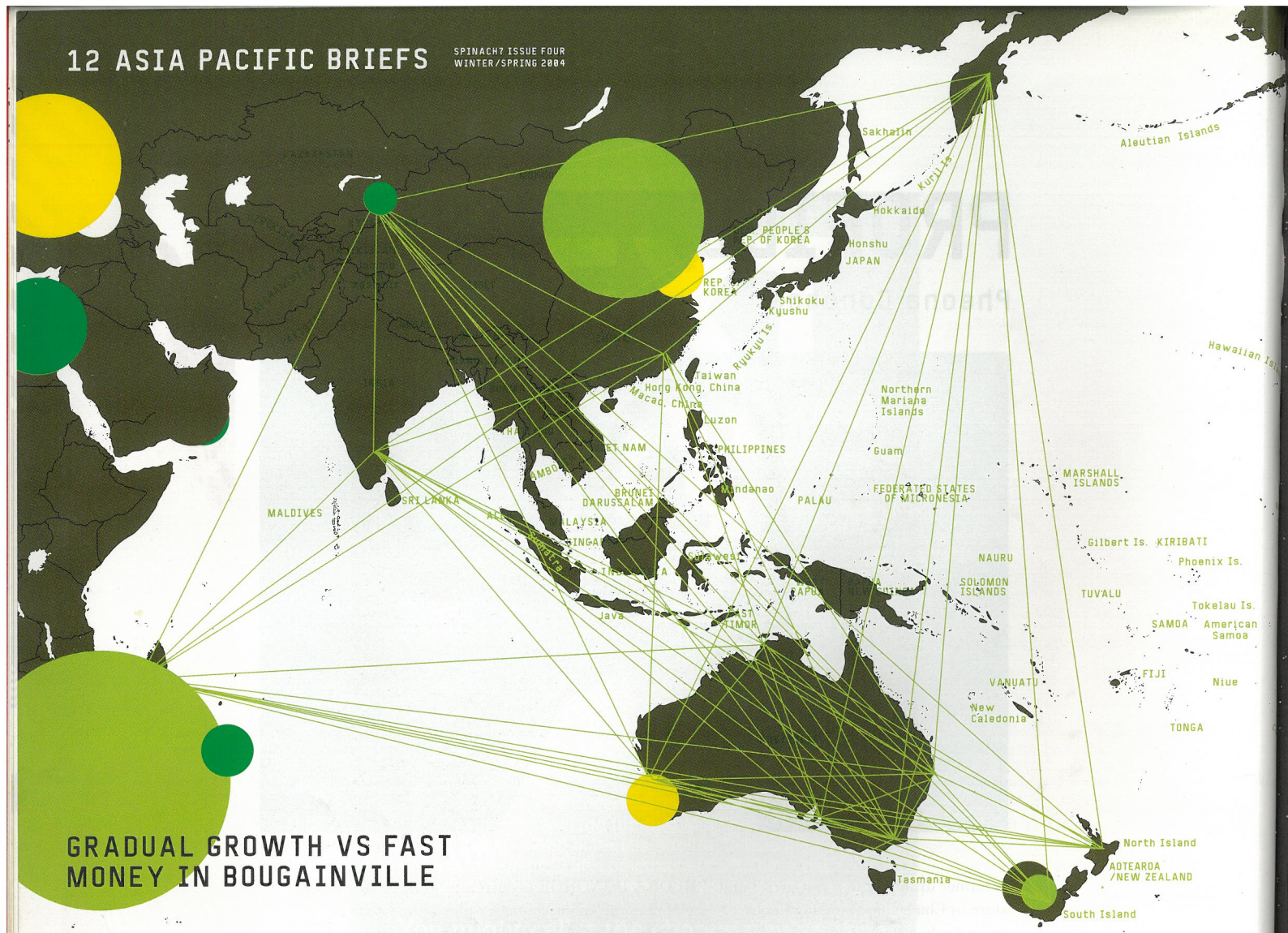
Juarez is a "frontier town": while American teenagers go there to scoff cheap Tequila, organised drug cartels use it as a base for smuggling operations. The industrial district hosts 300 assembling factories — *maquiladora* — for multinational corporations; much of their transient labour force is made of young women who have travelled from rural Mexico to find work. This is the underside of consumer culture in the world's 'fashion capitals'.

The bodies of women, *maquiladora* workers and others, are regularly found dumped in the surrounding Chihuahua desert. Kidnapped and gang-raped before murder, the police make only cursory attempts at investigating their deaths, a fact that has prompted substantive allegations of collusion and cover-up.

While in El Paso, Pheona felt unable to do much to help: "My Spanish was so terrible I couldn't volunteer at *Casa Amiga*, the rape crisis centre [in Juarez]. I was also living off my credit card so didn't have any money to donate."

Now back in Melbourne Pheona has commissioned a series of limited edition T-shirts from four artists / designers — Brendan Elliot (Burn), Rueben Stanton (Absent), Sara Bowyer (Tattoo Magic) and Chantel Camilleri (Hunter Gatherer). Made under non-sweatshop conditions the Ts will be on sale at an upcoming screening of the documentary *Senorita Extraviada* (Young Missing Women) on August 31 at the Australian Centre of the Moving Image in Melbourne, and the remainder in Hunter Gatherer shops in St Kilda and Fitzroy. Proceeds go to *Casa Amiga*. EVE VINCENT

http://www.womenofjuarez.com



GRADUAL GROWTH VS FAST MONEY IN BOUGAINVILLE

Papua New Guinea's restless province of Bougainville is preparing to elect its first autonomous government before the end of 2004.

The road to these elections has been long and rocky. A 1998 ceasefire ended the bitter 10 year secessionist war in which thousands of people were killed. In 2001 the PNG Government and Bougainvillean leaders signed a draft agreement on autonomy. Years of fragile peace negotiations have finally given way to reconciliation ceremonies between former enemies, the destruction of weapons used in the conflict, and planning for the future.

Veteran politician John Momis, once a key leader of the Bougainville secessionist movement and now Bougainville's governor, is doing some of that planning.

Momis, who was instrumental to the preparation of PNG's constitution 30 years ago, told *SPINACH7* the third draft of Bougainville's new constitution — which gives Bougainvilleans their own government, police, even courts, and eventually a referendum on the question of independence — is "in its final stages".

Elections, due in November, will be the next step towards political autonomy from PNG. But what about economic autonomy? Bougainvilleans, so proud of previous self-reliance, now face the uncomfortable fact that they are financially dependent on Port Moresby and foreign aid.

Momis is optimistic about Bougainville's economic future. He talks about new wharves at Buka in the north and Kangu Beach in the south, repaired roads and schemes to rehabilitate the cocoa industry and encourage vanilla bean farming. He says they are also "looking at business at a much higher level… We have even initiated talk of preparing a mining policy."

Mining remains an extremely delicate topic in Bougainville. Before being shut down by landowner action in 1989, the massive Panguna copper mine was the PNG economy's star performer. It was anger over environmental damage, distribution of profits and imported mine labour that sparked the divisive civil war. Simply resuming mining to solve economic dilemmas is out of the question, but Momis believes there may be room for mining of some sort in the new Bougainville.

"With more modern technology I think we will probably be in a much better position to make a go of another mine. The other thing is, a mine would be operated under our own policies, put in place by our own government, with the advantage of learning from past mistakes. But we have to be very careful. We have to take into account the landowners' rights… they must be given the recognition as one of the major stakeholders. In the Panguna mine the people were marginalised and it was run like an enclave," he says.

There is one Bougainvillean leader who has repeatedly refused to join the peace process: Francis Ona remains holed-up in the mountains demanding full independence, and has recently teamed-up with Noah Musingku, a notorious pyramid money scheme operator who is on the run from authorities in PNG and the Solomon Islands.

Momis is unsurprised by the alliance. "Ona without Musingku is ineffective — [he] can't offer a better alternative government system — and Musingku needs Ona to hide and to go on misleading, creating false expectations amongst the ignorant," he says.

"The Bougainville peace agreement has captured all the aspirations that both Francis Ona and the people of Bougainville wanted; that is, autonomy, a government of their own, and the guaranteed opportunity to have a referendum 10 to 15 years down the line to determine the ultimate final political status," says Momis. "It's all done constitutionally, it has the support of the international community — United Nations, Australia, New Zealand, everybody — and Ona can't match that." JOSH MEADOWS

ASIA PACIFIC BRIEFS

BIG BROTHERS BEHAVING BADLY

A report released earlier this year entitled *Big Brothers Behaving Badly* exposes how Australia and New Zealand ultimately coerced the Pacific Islands into a trade agreement they did not want — the Pacific Agreement on Closer Economic Relations, or PACER.

What began as the Pacific Island Countries Trade Agreement (PICTA) — a trade agreement among the Pacific Island states only — was eventually subordinated to PACER, at the insistence of the region's two biggest countries.

PICTA would have involved a gradual lowering of tariffs on goods traded among island states over a 10 year period. However, Australia and New Zealand were keen to ensure that their trade and economic interests in the Pacific Islands markets were protected, so PACER was drawn up to involve Australia and New Zealand in the deal. After a series of intense negotiations, the two larger countries eventually convinced their Pacific neighbours to sign the new agreement.

While not a free trade agreement in itself, PACER provides a framework for future free trade agreements and economic relations in the region as a whole. Without any formal assessment of its implications, the Pacific Islands Forum has also promised to negotiate a free trade agreement with Australia and New Zealand in 2011, or earlier if they begin similar talks with the European Union under the Cotonou Agreement.

Big Brothers Behaving Badly was authored by Jane Kelsey — professor of Law at Auckland University — and commissioned by the Pacific Network on Globalisation (PANG) in Suva, Fiji, a network formed by Pacific regional and national civil society groups to inform themselves on trade and globalisation issues.

Drawing from a range of interviews with politicians, diplomats, trade negotiators and consultants intimately involved with the negotiation process, Kelsey suggests that the Pacific Islands Forum governments ultimately felt powerless to say "no" to Australian and New Zealand demands on PACER: "Accounts from these meetings reveal a pattern of arrogance and intimidation that was led by Australia and condoned, sometimes mirrored, by New Zealand," she writes.

"Teams of trade officials from Australia and New Zealand, each of whom specialised in one area, would overwhelm the small teams of negotiators from each island country. Only Fiji, PNG, Samoa and the Cook Islands reportedly played an active role in the meetings — and they lacked the resources to assess the legal and economic implications of a stream of proposals, let alone their potential social impacts."

Many of the negotiations were conducted behind closed doors and away from public scrutiny, preventing informed debate about the implications of the agreement within Pacific countries. "If the bullying tactics and demands of Australia and New Zealand had been more widely known, negotiators and ministers could have used this to strengthen their hand," writes Kelsey. "Consultation was limited to selected members of the private sector."

PACER is likely to have negative long-term impacts in the Pacific because of the disparity in size and economic power between Australia/New Zealand and the island states. Under PACER, the largest and most efficient producers in the region are likely to displace production from other, smaller countries. This concentration of production will produce regional monopolies that are difficult to regulate nationally. Entering a free trade agreement with the region's superpowers will affect even the strongest of Pacific economies. STANLEY SIMPSON

Big Brothers Behaving Badly *is available at* http://www.pang.org.fj

TAX ON GREEN FUEL

Hundreds of Australians around the country make their own diesel fuel alternative at home, for use in their own vehicles. By reacting vegetable oil with an alcohol and a catalyst, you make biodiesel — a direct diesel replacement and one of the most sustainable fuels available.

Until last year, backyard biodiesel production was unregulated, making it a cheap as well as sustainable alternative to fossil fuel. But this situation has changed, with the introduction of a government requirement that all producers possess an annual excise manufacturer's licence to produce and store biodiesel.

In its *Energy White Paper* released in June 2004, the Federal Government re-stated its commitment to an excise tax on biodiesel and other alternative fuels. Biodiesel producers are obliged to pay an excise tax of 38 cents per litre — whether the fuel is made for personal or commercial purposes.

Until 2012, producers can claim all or part of this excise back under the Energy Grants Scheme, but only if the biodiesel meets the Federal Government's Fuel Quality Standard. Post 2012, the excise must be paid in full.

One Alice Springs producer says compliance to the standard will cost him up to $3000, making his home plant uneconomic. In addition, he needs to keep records outlining the quantity, storage and sale of biodiesel for at least five years if he claims back the excise.

As backyard producers assess their options, there is growing demand for commercial biodiesel. Insecurity in oil-producing countries has lead to high oil prices, prompting companies like the South Australian Farmers Fuels (SAFF) to enter the biodiesel business.

SAFF's Mike Jureidini expects biodiesel to comprise 10 per cent of South Australia's total diesel market by the middle of next year. The company currently sells biodiesel at around 90 cents per litre from two bowsers in Adelaide. It also supplies trucking companies and other commercial fleets. "We're only limited by how much recycled oil we can find," says Jureidini.

The company uses recycled vegetable oil, which makes it officially the most sustainable fuel on the market in Australia. In fact, it's the environmental credentials of biodiesel that SAFF believes make it so attractive to industry and individuals alike.

"Biodiesel has a heap of benefits. It's an Aussie product, which is a plus for energy security and regional economies. Consumers like it because we use recycled oil, making it a sustainable fuel. It's also great for the greenhouse, because it's renewable and if it's spilled, it biodegrades."

Darwin will soon have a biodiesel facility on its doorstep at East Arm Point. The facility is undergoing environmental assessment, and the company Natural Fuel is expecting to set up shop later this year.

Natural Fuel has announced its intention to use imported palm oil, rather than recycled oil as its feed stock, which has already prompted the local Northern Territory Environment Centre to speak out against it. The palm oil will be sourced from Indonesian and Malaysian plantations. Few companies can source their palm oil up the supply chain to confirm how and where it's produced, and it's widely known that Indonesia and Malaysian forests are being destroyed at an alarming rate due to illegal logging and clearing for palm oil plantations.

"It's in the company's best interest to recognise what the market wants — which is a sustainable alternative," says Jureidini in response. "But consumers should remember that biodiesel made from palm oil is still more sustainable than diesel."

It will be interesting to see what ultimately drives Australian consumers: price, or the desire for a truly sustainable alternative. KULJA COULSTON

CALL FOR TRANSPARENCY ON TASMANIA'S FORESTS

The Uniting Church has joined a long line of prominent organisations and individuals in calling for an independent and transparent regulator for Tasmania's forest industry. And it's no wonder. The links between the State Government and the state's largest logging company, Gunns Ltd, are long and close, while the organisation set up to monitor the industry is fraught with vested interests.

The Uniting Church report, released in late June, raises issues of accountability within the industry.

Both Gunns and Forestry Tasmania are exempt from Section 32 of the Freedom of Information Act (FOI). Under this section of the FOI, information that relates to Gunns and Forestry Tasmania's "performance and exercise of functions and powers" does not have to be publicly released.

This means the general public do not have access to information regarding how much forest is being clearfelled and woodchipped, who the woodchips are being sold to, or at what prices. Both entities are also exempt from the Threatened Species Act and the Land Planning and Development Act — which raises serious questions about the relationship between government and logging interests in the state.

It is no great secret that both the Liberal and Labor parties of Tasmania have been long time supporters of the logging industry, especially its woodchip enterprises — which account for over 90 per cent of the forests logged each year. Former Liberal Premier Robin Gray is Director of Gunns Ltd, and has been one of the timber industry's leading advocates throughout his time in politics.

Current Tasmanian Premier Paul Lennon, who is a former Minister for Forests, has also enjoyed a close relationship with the industry. Lennon is a former member of the pro-logging Forest Protection Society, and oversees the Forest Practices Board — a panel of individuals drawn from industry and government that regulates the industry and enforces breaches.

Partial cabinet appointments continue on into the lower ranks of the Tasmanian Labor Party. Bryan Green, the Minister for Infrastructure, Energy and Resources, was employed by North Ltd (bought out by Gunns) in the 1980s, and is a former union representative for the timber industry in Tasmania's north. While John Gay — who has worked for Gunns since the late 1980s and is now the CEO and Chair of the company — was appointed Director of Department of State Development in 2001. This posting lasted until last year, when Gay resigned for undisclosed reasons. Since that time Gay has taken on the role of Forest Industries Association of Tasmania (FIAT) Chair.

To have the premier, leading members of cabinet and the CEO of the state's largest and most powerful company share such obvious mutual interests is an impediment to any sort of meaningful and sustainable development in Tasmania, not only for local industry, but also for a depressed job market and an open and vibrant civil society.

There is a desperate need for federal intervention to curb the ingrained culture of cronyism between government and timber interests in Tasmania, and put a stopper on the wholesale destruction of native forests for the sake of woodchip sales. LOUISE MORRIS

Vibewire Youth Services Presents

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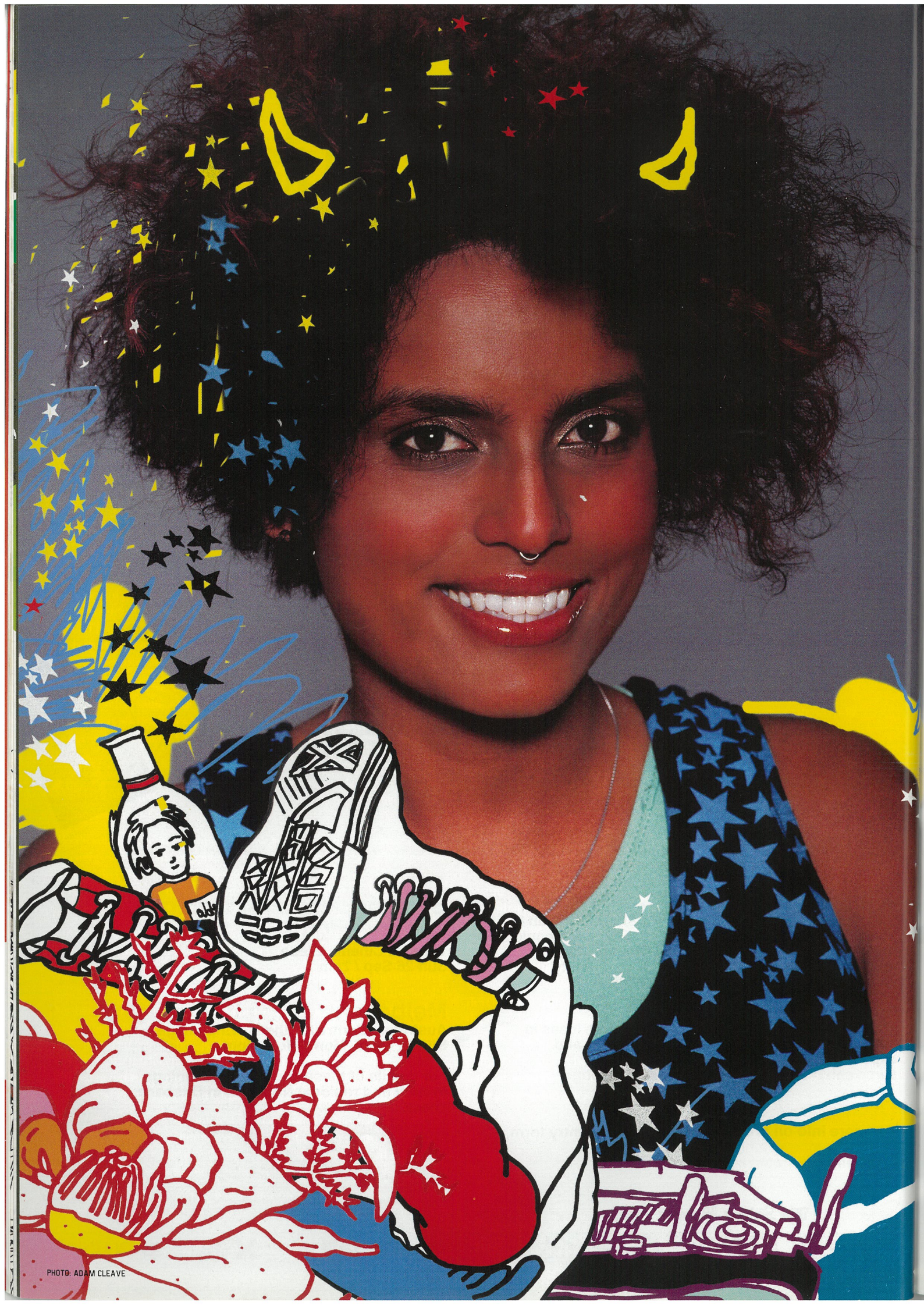

PHOTO: ADAM CLEAVE

In bed with Texta

Arlene TextaQueen's 'Textanudes' have adorned playing cards, been sent home on post cards and hung in galleries, and even come to life on SBS TV. The Melbourne-based artist — known simply as 'Texta', after her preferred medium — creates unique, hand-drawn portraits of "females, naked in their own habitat." Texta has been devoted to her felt tip markers for over seven years, and describes her work as a re-interpretation of the salon nude. SHANE McGRATH reveals all.

I first met Texta at a party in Adelaide. She was convening a game of strip poker around a pack of her own playing cards — the *Textanudes 54*. I passed quickly from enthusiastic participant, to enthusiastic loser — lapping the party, as per the penalty for the first one naked. It was the beginning of a beautiful friendship.

For this article, I meet Texta at her sister Keg's house, where she's staying while visiting Sydney. When I arrive she has, of course, forgotten I'm coming; it's only my knocking that wakes her up. The scene, as she sleepily half-rises from the mess of blankets and backpacks amidst which she's sleeping on Keg's lounge room floor, isn't far from the tableaus of her drawings. Each Textanude features a quote, something the subject has said during the drawing session, and if this was my portrait of Texta, the quote would be: "What do you mean, 'What does it mean?' It just is." But this is not a portrait; a writer must contextualise.

DON'T WRITE THAT

Texta and Keg are talking about an application they've just put in for a show at Platform Gallery in Melbourne — Texta will draw their friends sleeping while Keg offers elliptically precise interpretations of their dreams in word and picture. Writing the application, Texta tells me, Keg asked what the show meant. "What do you mean, 'what does it mean'?" Texta exclaimed. "It just is."

Before we start, Texta says she prefers being interviewed by strangers: "When it's a stranger you say, 'Oh, I try to do this and this and this.' But when it's a friend you're like, 'I like to see 'em naked! Heh heh heh.'" I flip open my notebook to write this down and she adds, "Don't write that down!" — a phrase that will punctuate our conversation from here on. (This, presumably, is why a better class of journalists use dictaphones.)

MC Pash 2004

Azaria Universe 2004

She offers her 4 of Clubs — Katie, wrapped in a microphone cord with a Michael Jackson 7" over her crotch — as an example of where a close friendship can take a picture.

Here are some things I tell Texta I won't put in the article: a) that in high school art class she painted a "very photorealistic" version of the cover of The Cure's *Standing on a Beach*, b) that when I ask about 'space' as a theme in her work, and what associations that brings up for her, all she can think of is *Spaceballs*, ie, the lame 80s Mel Brooks *Star Wars* parody, which she's just watched, c) [deleted on legal advice — ed.], d) that when I ask her if the glass is half full or half empty she laughs and holds her head for a second before she starts to answer, e) that she's gotten better at keeping secrets, and f) two jokes:

Q: What's white, Irish, and sits on the veranda?
A: Paddy O'Furniture.

And:
Q: What's better than eating a mandarin?
A: Eating Amanda out.

They say you can tell a lot about someone by the jokes they like, and what these two have in common is a resistance to being written down: each depends on a wordplay you only really get by telling them aloud. Texta is similarly difficult to pin down in language; hesitant to explain or reflect on her work. At one point, she mentions a critic who called her work "almost outsider art", as if this refusal to interpret, to represent the work in language, indicated an absence of thought that verged on disability, barbarian incompetence and wildness. But what if the work and its ideas take their vitality from the silences and secrets of the friendships they encompass? As my favourite ever artist, Jack Smith, said: "Look at what I have to do to think of thoughts. I have to forget language."

ALMOST INSIDER ART

The irony of the "outsider art" line is that Texta is so intently inside her subject, which — beyond individuals — is community, and place. Originally from Perth, she says she probably wouldn't have developed her work past high school (and The Cure painting) anywhere else; it's a place where you have to make your own fun. In Perth, you know everyone at least vaguely, and there's a parochial cultural cringe that assumes anything local is uninteresting. Texta, like lots of people, is fiercely and ambivalently loyal to her home town: she loves it, the amazing people and work you wouldn't find anywhere else — anywhere people weren't so obliged to make their own fun. If one were compiling a list of key phrases for understanding Texta, here one would add: *to make your own fun*.

"So before," I say, "you were saying that you just like looking at naked chicks…"

"I think it's totally the opposite really. Like Katie [star of a number of Textanudes] was over the other night, and she was saying how cute I was

Keg and Me 2003

when I first came to Sydney, how I was really shy and would just sit in the corner drawing people. I think it took a long time for my personality to catch up with what I was doing — I don't know if I would like looking at naked people if I hadn't done it for my art."

In Sydney, Texta moved into the famed Broadway Squats. It was an "instrumental" step for her art, since steep local rents made art supplies difficult to come by otherwise. "And just mentally I was much happier because I had the money to… " she pauses, as if wondering what besides art supplies she would need money for, "… to live! And the space, because there was so much space, and a really great community. Just being really happy in my home made things much easier. Later, all that time fighting the eviction I hardly made any art, but it was a really inspiring time in terms of community and standing up for something you believe in. Both your home and a principle." She remembers the show she had in Squatspace — the gallery at Broadway that she helped set up — as her favourite, because it was in her own space, and all her friends helped.

'In her own space, and all her friends helped' may be the best description possible of Texta's art. Texta's space is made up of relations: the relation of an individual to their immediate environment (especially the bedroom), and then the way this relation itself relates to and creates community, scene and city. The oblique angles in her work, the knack for radical foreshortenings, the way textas, as a medium, refract all distances into a kind of tensed possibility that it would be bizarrely inadequate to describe in terms of flatness and depth, all express this particular space.

As a medium, textas refract all distances into a kind of tensed possibility that would be bizarrely inadequate to describe in terms of flatness and depth.

FRIENDS 4 LIFE

If Texta's work is about relations, the most important relation is friendship. "Yeah," she says when I suggest this, her only enthusiastic response to my inquiries about theme, "it's all about friends."

"I think that's why I'm really choosy about who I draw. When I'm drawing a nude I really leave it up to the person to pose how they want to pose and how they present themselves. But I mostly know the person pretty well. I want to make a great portrait of them because they're great people. It's a pretty special experience — I'm really privileged."

Amy Gale 2004

"I think you can tell the portraits where I knew the people well," she says. "When it's someone you don't know very well it's harder to say, 'why don't you do this, why don't you do that' — you don't push it as far as you might." She offers her 4 of Clubs — Katie, wrapped in a microphone cord with a 7" of Michael Jackson's *Thriller* over her crotch — as an example of where a close friendship can take a picture. "It's less… more set up, less casual, but that's because it's more casual."

Texta has explained her work in terms of recontextualising the tradition of the female nude in art — a tradition dominated by the gaze of the Great White Artist and spectators privileged with the cultural capital to appreciate The Work. She does this by making friendship, and especially women's friendships, the main subject and dynamic of the nude.

Keg says that the strength of her sister's work is that Texta's "*sort of* part of the commercial gallery scene, but also another scene. She'll go to squats and protests and get people playing strip poker." Apparently not noting the pun, she adds, "She's not just playing one game. She can be herself and not get sucked completely into the art context."

The *Textanudes* 54

"When I have an opening," Texta says, "heaps of people come who never come to art openings and say, 'Are they all this fun?' 'No.' Because I do portraits of amazing people and then those amazing people come with their amazing friends and do amazing things."

If friendship is at the heart of a body of work, then friendships are part of that work, and the depths and ranges of the friendships captured in these portraits are an amazing work of generosity and playfulness. These are like the passionate friendships of childhood, thick with (at least in the adult imagination) secrets, fantasies, possibilities. Michael Taussig on children's picture books could easily be describing Texta's work: "The objects do not come to meet the picturing child from the pages of the book; instead the gazing child enters into those pages, becoming suffused, like a cloud, with the riotous colours of the world of pictures."

At dinner a few nights later, I tell Texta I need an ending for this article, so I hope she'll get drunk and do something memorable that encapsulates everything I want to say about her. She looks nervously at her brandy and lemon juice. "That's the best way to get someone to shut up, you know," she says. I want to shut up, because shutting up would bear the greatest fidelity to Texta's work, which is one long conscientious objection to the banality of things that can't go without saying. I have tried to describe her in directions rather than sentences, just as, in the first draft of these words, the paragraph curled around the place on the page where I'd spilled my water. But still. I wish I had more words, so I could continue to contemplate their redundancy to the riotous colours of the world of pictures.

Texta will be undertaking a Rude Shock *residency at Penrith Regional Art Gallery (NSW) from August 23 to September 27 with three other artists, and has a solo show at the Perth Institute of Contemporary Art (PICA) in October.*

http://www.textanudes.net

SHANE MCGRATH IS A PHD CANDIDATE AT THE UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY. HE IS WORKING ON THE INTERSECTIONS BETWEEN BORDER CONTROL, POP MUSIC, AND ONCOLOGY.

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'Hardline' or Hard-Hearted?

ESTHER SINGER investigates the health and social effects of the Federal Government's 'tough on drugs' rhetoric.

Late last year the Federal Government moved to amend the Disability Discrimination Act to ***allow*** discrimination against certain people. Which people did the Howard government decide were unworthy of protection? Illicit "drug addicts", as the proposed legislation referred to them. Drug dependency is widely considered a disability, and classified as such in other countries. However, this amendment would enable landlords, employers, health services, clubs and others to discriminate against people who use illicit drugs, even if their behaviour was not causing any problems. Drug users would only be protected from discrimination if they were receiving "treatment" for their "addiction". Neither treatment nor addiction were adequately defined in the amendment Bill.

After fierce lobbying by the health and drug sector, the Bill was referred to a senate committee, which reported back in April. The report found "there is no need for the Bill", that "the potential for an increase in the marginalisation of drug-dependent people is also of concern" and that "the potential public health and social impacts of the Bill if passed cannot be ignored".

The Bill now looks unlikely to proceed. But, with its pejorative references to "drug addicts" and its attempt to force people into treatment, it stands as a guide to the Federal Government's attitude to drug users, and to the 'drug problem' generally. So how did we get to be 'tough on drugs'? And what does all this look like from a drug user's perspective?

HARM REDUCTION

Since 1998, when the Howard government launched a new National Drug Strategy – Tough on Drugs – there has been a shift away from talking about drug use as a health issue to a more punitive approach.

It's a far cry from the feeling two decades ago when Australians watched as then Prime Minister Bob Hawke wept on national television when asked about drug problems. Hawke later revealed that his daughter was a heroin user. This was the impetus for a new focus in national policy, and in 1985 the National Campaign Against Drug Abuse was launched, with all Australian State and Federal Governments adopting 'harm reduction' as the official policy. Although most funding still went to law enforcement, the change paved the way for later developments to reduce drug related harm; such as Needle and Syringe Programs (NSPs) and the methadone program. Both programs were initiated in response to the risk of a major HIV outbreak among injecting drug users. Importantly, they are based on the recognition that people will use illicit drugs, and need to be able to do so as safely as possible.

Harm reduction takes a neutral approach to drug use, rather than a moral one, and has an emphasis on programs that respect the dignity of drug users and are supported by research. In practice it can mean education about safe drug use; de-criminalisation to remove the harm caused by drug users' interactions with the justice system; and funding NSPs, which were the flagship project of Australia's harm reduction era. NSPs now include over 3000 outlets where clean injecting equipment can be obtained. These range from health services, hospitals and pharmacies to dedicated needle exchanges and mobile services. Australia's approach was internationally recognised, particularly our effectiveness in stemming an HIV outbreak.

PHOTOS: REGIS MARTIN

Harm reduction takes a neutral approach to drug use, rather than a moral one, and has an emphasis on programs that respect the dignity of drug users and are supported by research.

By the mid-90s it seemed that momentum for drug law reform was also building. Cannabis law reform — often seen as a first step in broader reforms — was inching forward across the nation, with the ACT and South Australia both decriminalising the growing and possession of small amounts. In 1997, the Wood Royal Commission into the New South Wales Police Service emphasised the links between police corruption and the prohibition of illicit drugs, and explored the desirability of a system of regulation to provide these drugs.

The same year the ACT prescription heroin trial was approved by a majority of Commonwealth and State Health and Police Ministers. The Commonwealth Health and Justice Ministers were among those who supported the trial but this did not prevent the decision being overruled by Federal Cabinet, in the wake of a concerted campaign by the tabloid press and talkback radio. But Howard had not counted on community support for the heroin trial (around 47 per cent according to some polls) and was reportedly stung by the criticism he copped following the Cabinet veto.

In a bid to regain some support the Tough on Drugs strategy was hastily written. It pledged to pour millions more into law enforcement, and (unsurprisingly, considering the PM's penchant for the mass mail-out) an education pack was sent to all households. An advisory body, the Australian National Council on Drugs (ANCD) was also established to ensure that the non-government sector had a say in policy direction. Conservative Christian stalwart Salvation Army Major Brian Watters currently heads the ANCD and members include researchers, managers of treatment services, education staff and even a parent representative from family organisation Toughlove. There is no representative from drug user groups.

TREATMENT

The proposed Disability Discrimination Act amendment is one of many recent government measures that seek to force illicit drug users into treatment. This is despite all the evidence that shows treatment works only when fully voluntary.

And at the moment drug users report being knocked back for treatment again and again, by agencies with long waiting lists. Some services have even given up keeping lists, as it is too demoralising for people to be told they are 80th or 100th in line. Instead people are asked to call back and check availability. This is not always an easy ask for someone with a serious dependency and transient lifestyle.

Annie Madden from the Australian Injecting and Illicit Drug Users' League (AIVL) reports that "it's increasingly difficult to get into certain kinds of drug treatment programs and they're the ones that are in most demand. … Money is mostly going to Christian-based abstinence programs." Most drug users want pharmacotherapy (like methadone) and in-patient detox. According to Madden, many of these programs are "just surviving". In rural areas, drug users can expect to wait up to 12 months to get a place in a methadone program. That's 12 months of continued drug use. For those using amphetamines, the options are even fewer — with no established treatment programs available, despite calls from the sector for a trial of dexamphetamine replacement therapy.

Annie Madden PHOTO: MADELEINE DONOVAN

JUST SAY NO

In an interview with journalist Mischa Schubert on Channel 10's *Meet the Press* late last year Federal Health Minister Tony Abbott stated: "Frankly, 'just say no' is probably a pretty good message to things like illegal drugs." Abbott also insisted that Tough on Drugs is working, citing the fall in overdose deaths.

Annie Madden is one of the most high profile injecting drug users in the policy community. She's the Executive Officer of the Australian Injecting and Illicit Drug Users' League (AIVL), the peak body representing injecting drug users nationally. She argues that Tough on Drugs "has pushed us back to a very base level. ... 'Zero tolerance' paints harm reduction initiatives as 'sending the wrong message'." And as long as the government worries about sending the 'right message' about drugs, it is powerless to address the real health and social effects of drug use.

The results of sending an unambiguous message can clearly be seen in the United States, where zero tolerance policies have prevented federal funding being used for NSPs or education to reduce drug-related harm. The outcome — one in three of the 40 000 new HIV infections every year is estimated to be the result of injecting drug use. After 20 years of a 'just say no' campaign the Surgeon General — head of US public health — admitted it is not an effective message to prevent drug use.

Undeterred, the Howard government points to overdose statistics and has been known to claim responsibility for the heroin drought of 2001. (See The Drought below.) These few headline grabbing statistics and the wondrous television spectacle of the latest police seizure — white powder found in a crate, or pills between pastry — dominate media coverage of drug policy.

But do government announcements about how much they are doing to stem the flow of drugs into the country distract from the reality?

Federal Health Minister Tony Abbott says that "the best way to avoid hepatitis C is not to use illicit drugs".

THE SO-CALLED DROUGHT

The Howard government has claimed that the 2001 "heroin drought" was caused — in part — by the increase in funding to law enforcement aimed at blocking supply of illicits. In 2001, the National Crime Authority estimated the annual consumption rate of heroin to be around 6.7 tonnes and confessed that the record seizures of 734 kilograms had made little difference, capturing only 12 per cent of the heroin being consumed. Overdose rates did start to fall at this point, but experts consider it unlikely that Australian supply reduction programs had anything to do with this.

Much more likely is a combination of global factors. Several years of drought in Burma where most of Australia's heroin comes from; changes to supply from Afghanistan because of the war; and an increase in heroin use in countries closer to the Golden Triangle are believed to be behind the drop in supply. Important too was a financial decision by traffickers in the region to switch from supplying Australia with heroin, to amphetamines.

Reporting of overdose rates is also suspect. While fatal overdoses have clearly fallen in recent years, non-fatal overdoses are at similar levels to 2000. This may indicate that the overdose rate has fallen because of safer using practices or even better ambulance services, rather than because of a fall in drug use generally.

Police in Victoria are now reporting the "heroin drought" to be over — with purity still low but prices lower than ever. Howard claims "any retreat from the zero-tolerance approach the Government has would be a signal to those who would traffic in drugs that this country has gone soft". But with an industry worth billions annually, drug traffickers are not easily put off by law enforcement. And as recent cases have confirmed, it's always possible to find police willing to take a pay off. Police corruption is just one of the reasons that high-level police officers often claim that enforcement is just not working.

While the government claims to be targeting dealers and traffickers, reports from enforcement agencies indicate that most people caught up in the criminal justice system would best be defined as 'users' rather than 'providers'.

Steve Liebke

PHOTO: MADELEINE DONOVAN

HEALTH CRISIS

Hepatitis C infection rates increased by 45 per cent during the first four years of being Tough on Drugs. One Australian is now infected every half an hour; just over 90 per cent of these infections are due to injecting drug use.

Steve Liebke works at the Australian Hepatitis Council and is also a member of the Canberra Alliance for Harm Minimisation and Advocacy (CAHMA) a needle exchange and drug user organisation. Liebke argues that by virtue of its policies, the Federal Government is "complicit" in the epidemic and that it "has to take responsibility" for the fact that more that one per cent of the Australian population is now infected with a preventable, potentially debilitating disease.

Emily Hayes, a worker with Melbourne's mobile needle exchange, Foot Patrol, agrees. Hayes works with the most marginalised of drug users — those who have nowhere but the streets to use. She distributes clean syringes and needles paid for by the Victorian State Government. But the service has to fund other injecting equipment, like spoons, torniquets and sterile water, by contracting out its services. So workers do syringe disposal for the local council and institutions to top up the coffers.

As Hayes takes me on a tour of Melbourne's injecting rooms (tiny carparks, hidden lanes), we notice soft drink bottle lids among the used fits. She explains that these are used to mix up in because, at the moment, a lack of funds means that the exchange can't distribute plastic spoons. These cheap and simple bits of injecting equipment are vital to preventing infection. Unlike HIV, hepatitis C can survive in the tiniest traces of blood and for relatively long periods of time. Any shared equipment — not just needles and syringes — can be infectious. When asked if it's possible to reduce infection rates Hayes is clear: "only if you had all the equipment available 24 hours".

Funding levels for NSPs have not kept pace with inflation and wage costs, nor with the changing needs of the drug scene. Extended hours are rare even in major cities. In the heart of Melbourne's street drug scene, Foot Patrol operates for less than 12 hours a day; only seven on weekends.

Madden is also angry about the under-resourcing of NSPs. She says health education about safe use is not backed up by dollars. "If people can't get access because the service isn't open when they need it to be, or when they do get to the service the service has budget constraints and therefore can't give them the amount of equipment they need to practice safe injecting — it's empty rhetoric."

The government continues to put the blame back onto drug users. Abbott says that "the best way to avoid hepatitis C is not to use illicit drugs. I would urge people to take the same hardline view on that kind of lawbreaking as we do on other kinds of lawbreaking." To Liebke the message is clear: "drug users are just filthy junkies and we know their health is bad, but we don't care".

But with treatment costs for government estimated at $20 000 per infection, it starts to seem like bad policy for the Health Minister to hope that drug users will "just say no".

A CHANGING DRUG SCENE

As any NSP can tell you, injecting drug use is on the increase, even as overdose rates fall. By focusing their success stories on overdose rates, the government also obscures an alarming trend: the recent rise in methamphetamine use.

Liebke has noticed that some methamphetamines available these days are more often sold as pastes, rather than the powders, and are difficult to snort: methamphetamine is now much more likely to be injected, and its use is associated with increasing violence and serious mental health problems. But for a new generation of injecting drug users, meth use doesn't have the stigma of heroin.

The widespread practice of injecting pharmaceutical pills is also of concern. One of the most popular, temazepan, has recently been banned from being supplied in gel capsule form, but needle exchange workers report that it's still readily available. Over the counter drugs are also popular, either to stretch out small hits or as a preferred drug. Hayes comments that tablets "have nasty health risks, they're not designed to be injected". Users risk amputation by injecting into their groin area, and services are not funded to provide the filters that could help pill users prevent blood clots and infections. Despite the huge health risks associated with injecting tablets, the federal government is awfully quiet on the issue. Hayes is disappointed that there have not been enough peer education campaigns on the risks of tablet use.

Emily Hayes with Foot Patrol's mobile needle exchange backpack. PHOTO: REGIS MARTIN

DOING TIME

With a Health Minister who urges people to take a "hardline view" on drug use as "lawbreaking", it's not surprising that a major effect of drug policy continues to be the criminilisation, and incarceration, of drug users.

It's estimated that of the hundreds of millions of dollars the States and Commonwealth put into battling illicit drugs, over 80 per cent goes to law enforcement, while roughly five per cent goes to treatment and the rest to prevention and research. While the government claims to be targeting dealers and traffickers, reports from enforcement agencies indicate that most people caught up in the criminal justice system would best be defined as 'users' rather than 'providers'. Hayes, who sees the effect of policing on Foot Patrol clients, agrees that it's "users and street dealers" who are targeted. Nationwide it's estimated that roughly one in two inmates are serving time for drug-related offences. It's not just for so-called 'hard drugs' either. In NSW alone last year 11 214 people were charged with possession or use of cannabis.

Sadly, jails too, contribute to the hepatitis C problem. Drugs are still readily available inside, while clean injecting equipment is not. Hayes says many of her clients were infected on the inside, where infection rates are estimated at up to 70 per cent. She says NSPs in prisons are a must: "they're small policy shifts but they would create a bit more duty of care". Stuart Loveday, Executive Officer of the Hepatitis C Council of NSW describes "an unofficial needle 'exchange' already operating in prisons. … Needles are sharpened up against walls and shared up to 200 times each." User groups, doctors and a draft report commissioned by the ANCD and leaked in early July have all called for the introduction of NSPs into the prison system. Successful models for prison programs exist in Europe and could go a long way to stemming infection rates — especially as most drug offenders serve fairly short sentences and are then back in the community potentially infecting others. States, Territories and the Federal Government, however, refuse to budge on the issue. In doing so, Loveday argues, "they are putting lives at risk".

NSPS UNDER ATTACK

The Governments' refusal to support needle exchanges in prisons is typical of their approach to NSPs. Basic funding to programs has been maintained, because the results are so well evidenced. Quite simply, NSPs both improve the quality of, and save lives. As the recent ***Returns on Investment Report*** showed, they also save the government a lot of money. Between 1991 and 2001 the Commonwealth spent only $150 million on NSPs, resulting in savings estimated at $7.7 billion from prevention of HIV and hepatitis C treatment costs alone.

Instead of finding themselves lauded and expanded as a result of this report, NSPs have found themselves under constant pressure to expand the range of services they offer, without an increase in funding. They have not been given new resources to cope with the hepatitis C epidemic.

There are numerous examples of NSPs coming under political pressure from prohibitionists who see them as part of the problem. Programs in high use areas such as St Marys and Ryde in NSW have been forced to close, under pressure from those who see them as a 'honey pot' for drug activity. In reality, drug activity in such areas almost always predates NSPs, which is why they are located there. Recently, at the same time as health experts warned of an outbreak of HIV infections in Aboriginal communities due to high levels of injecting drug use in Redfern, there have been calls by police and others to stop the provision of clean needles via the mobile NSP that currently visits the area.Madden argues that "the Howard government has created an anti-drug user mood, and that has then lead to backlashes in the media and in the community against needle and syringe programs, against methadone programs, against drug users".

WHERE TO FROM HERE?

At the Commonwealth level, the law enforcement approach seems entrenched. The draft of the new National Drug Strategic Framework for 2004-9 was recently released. It doesn't recognise addressing hepatitis C as a priority or objective of the strategy. Nor does it recognise the importance of peer education in reducing drug related harm.

Madden describes the current government as "very uncompassionate. They are hard, they are very mean and they don't seem to have much regard for people who use drugs as human beings." This "creates a real sense of vulnerability". Drug users are "being made to feel that they're very lucky to get anything they get". Hayes finds it hard to imagine a better future. "I just see more and more negatives for my clients," she says. Madden agrees that "it's really easy to get very despondent in this area because the changes are so few and far between".

The one hope she has though, is that the Howard government's approach has made some people wake up to what is going on. She has seen "a larger proportion of the community starting to be a bit more vocal on these issues, saying, 'this is not a compassionate approach'." She tells me about going on talkback radio to discuss the proposed Disability Discrimination Act amendments. Pretty much everyone who called in said "This is not okay. This is kicking people when they're down."

ESTHER SINGER IS A COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT WORKER BASED IN MELBOURNE.

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Student protesters hold posters picturing ex-military commanders General Wiranto and Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono during an anti-militarism rally in Jakarta. PHOTO: EPA/WEDA

Indonesia's Festival of Democracy

DAMIEN KINGSBURY

Indonesia went to the polls on July 5, in the country's first democratic presidential elections. If democracy is about having the option of voting, then Indonesia has finally come of age, with all citizens now having a direct say in who will be their president.

Yet this remains a country that is struggling to throw off the shackles of the New Order, in which presidential candidates present no real policies, in which the military is again politically powerful, corruption remains rampant and the domestic economy a shambles, and in which the 'War on Terror' is used as an excuse to violently suppress separatist sentiment. In such an environment, one may ask whether voting is enough of a definition — democracy remains a tenuous notion in the archipelago.

THE CONTENDERS

The incumbent heading in to the elections, Megawati Sukarnoputri, initially failed to achieve the presidency in 1999, losing out to the blind and somewhat frail Islamic cleric, Abdurrahman Wahid. Abdurrahman's idiosyncratic style and lapses of judgment earned him considerable public disfavour as president, while his reformist zeal also alienated much of the military and other of Indonesia's power holders, a coalition of which brought him down. He was dumped by the legislature in July 2001.

Megawati was almost unanimously elected to replace him, but after achieving office with such goodwill she displayed her own idiosyncrasies, exemplified by a tendency to do nothing and say less. If Megawati had one strength, however, it was that she enjoyed the overwhelming support of the Indonesian military. With this behind her — coupled with her willingness to comply with military demands — Megawati was assured of a full term in office.

One of the most interesting developments in this year's presidential election race was the candidature of former military commander General (retired) Wiranto. Wiranto took the lead from a strong field of Golkar party (of Suharto fame) candidates, including party chief Akbar Tanjung and former military foe and Suharto son-in-law, Prabowo Subianto. Akbar has been convicted of the theft of public funds, which only dimmed his political prospects marginally, and Prabowo was seen as too much the villain from his period as head of the military's notorious special forces, Kopassus, which committed numerous and well documented human rights abuses under his leadership.

Wiranto was under a cloud of his own, having been indicted by a court in Dili on war crimes committed in East Timor in 1999. This was not necessarily going to work against him in Indonesia, where a rising sense of 'nationalism' supported Wiranto's candidature. However, being indicted meant that, even after the presidential elections, he would not be able to leave the country without being arrested.

Wiranto's advantages included having the Golkar party's well-established political machine behind him, which was especially useful in the outer islands. On top of this, he is perceived as a strong (ie quasi-authoritarian) leader, and has access to very significant funds, both from his own extensive business investments and other sources. Wiranto also has a lovely singing voice, which he employed to great advantage at public political rallies, saving him from having to present actual policies.

The Indonesian military retains significant power in the political arena.

PHOTO: AP/IRWIN FEDRIANSYA

Two of the candidates — Amien Rais and Hamza Haz — never looked like being serious contenders in the race. Amien, the head of the National Mandate Party and one-time leader of Indonesia's second biggest Islamic organisation, Muhammadiyah, appeared to be tilting for presidency as a means of gathering support for securing another institutional position. While Hamza, Megawati Sukarnoputri's vice-president and leader of the hard-line Islamic United Development Party (PPP), only chose to run for president when Megawati overlooked him as her running mate.

The final and most popular candidate was Lieutenant-General (retired) Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono. A former close friend of Wiranto, Susilo split with Wiranto over the issue of the role of the military in politics, with Susilo taking a more explicitly reformist line. Susilo was later appointed by both Abdurrahman Wahid and Megawati to a cabinet position once occupied by Wiranto: Coordinating Minister for Political and Security Affairs, which is the most important position apart from the presidency itself. However, Megawati's husband, Taufik Kiemas, pushed him out of the cabinet when it became clear that Susilo harboured his own ambitions toward presidency. Interestingly, for a military 'reformer', Susilo was at pains during the election campaign to express his support for military conservatism.

At the time of writing, a second round of elections is likely to take place in September, as none of the candidates have managed to achieve a majority vote in the first round.

Regardless of who is to take the presidency, each of the candidates would face the same challenges upon assuming office this coming October. This is because no single candidate will be able to command a majority in the legislature; because any Indonesian president must pander to deeply vested interests; and because of the capacity of the military to intervene in political affairs.

Surrounded by the rhetoric of reformasi it was indeed possible to believe that fundamental change was afoot.

THE EVOLUTION OF A POLITICAL SYSTEM

Following the experience under Suharto — who was both a strong and violent leader — coupled with the relative incompetence of his successors, there is a widespread belief in Indonesia that presidential authority must be balanced by a powerful and independent legislature. But with so many parties taking a share of the vote for the legislature (DPR) and no one party achieving even a quarter of it, combined with the increased power of the DPR relative to the presidency, any president will have to work with and reflect at least some of the other parties' interests.

What this means is that the new cabinet, to be appointed in October, will almost certainly include senior members of the various parties, who will be chosen not for their competence but for their political constituency. The result will most likely be — as was the case with the Wahid government — a largely dysfunctional cabinet marked by empire building and a lack of internal cooperation.

A beggar sleeps in front of a wall of posters picturing presidential candidate General Wiranto. PHOTO: EPA/WEDA

THE MILITARY IN POLITICS

Meanwhile, Indonesia's military — Tentara Nasional Indonesia (or TNI) — has re-established itself as a major political force in Indonesian domestic affairs.

The conventional view of Indonesian politics in the period following Suharto's fall in May 1998, was that the state was undergoing a process of democratic transition, and that the military itself was undergoing a process of reform. Surrounded by the rhetoric of *reformasi* (reform) and the TNI's *paradim baru* (new paradigm) it was indeed possible to believe that fundamental change was afoot. This has not eventuated.

Although Indonesia was deeply reluctant to be drawn into the US 'War onTerror', it did employ what President Megawati's adviser called "the blessing of September 11" — to re-assert its own domestic military agenda.

It has been suggested by some observers that Indonesia's process of reform halted around the time President Wahid was deposed from office in 2001, to be replaced by his more conservative Vice-President Megawati Sukarnoputri. There is little doubt that the senior echelons of the TNI were deeply opposed to Wahid, and helped undermine his presidency. With Megawati as president, the TNI assumed greater political authority and autonomy — in cabinet, constitutional affairs and security matters.

From April this year, the TNI no longer has representation in the legislature. However, its removal from this political arena, while important, was largely cosmetic, as this was never where its actual power base resided. The TNI's real political and economic strength derives from its territorial structure, through which the military locates itself throughout the archipelago — in theory to defend Indonesia against external enemies, but in reality to hold the disparate state together, by force if necessary. Moves towards winding this in were not only scrapped in 2002, the structure was actually expanded.

The TNI remains a huge impediment to democracy in Indonesia. As Abdurrahman Wahid discovered, the capacity for the TNI to undermine a president was (and remains) substantial. Similarly, knowing its own vulnerability, Indonesia's political and economic elite has been quick to coalesce around the TNI, making it relatively easy for the military to construct a substantial opposition to political leaders it believes are trying to obstruct its self-selecting political agenda.

ISLAM AND THE 'WAR ON TERROR'

Indonesia has also experienced a resurgence of political Islam in recent years, a phenomenon that had been tightly controlled under Suharto. While much of this has manifested in political parties and social and welfare groups, the past five years have also seen the development of radical Islamic militias. These share a basic common philosophy with, or have direct links to, global terrorist organisations such as al-Qaeda. While the mainstream Islamic parties are not anti-democratic, a number of the minor parties are pushing for *syariah* (Islamic law), which does slip too easily into the promotion of *jihad* (holy war).

While Indonesia is by no means about to become an Islamic state, Islam remains an important part of politics and public life, and so efforts to quash extreme Islamic groups are a sensitive area for any government. No political leader wants to alienate the Islamic community, especially given that an attack on some Muslims is seen as an attack on all, and that all mainstream political leaders are, of course, also Muslim.

Although Indonesia was deeply reluctant to be drawn into the United States' 'War on Terror', it did employ what President Megawati's adviser Rizal Mallarangeng called "the blessing of September 11" — to re-assert its own domestic military agenda, and re-legitimise its profoundly tarnished special forces, Kopassus, for its counter-terrorist function. The Bali bombings, which killed 202 foreign and local people, and injured many more, only reinforced the perceived need for a strong anti-terrorist force in Indonesia. In all, the 'rise of terrorism' has worked in favour of Indonesia by re-legitimising its domestic military operations in the eyes of the United States and its allies, including Australia, in particular its renewed operations against separatists in Aceh.

However, except for the circumscribed joint effort with Australian Federal Police in tracking down those directly involved in the Bali and Marriott Hotel bombings, the now internationally recognised terrorist organisation Jemah Islamiah (JI) has effectively been ignored by the TNI and other Indonesian authorities. Dozens of bombings from 1999 onwards, which have been attributed to JI, were only haphazardly investigated.

This will remain the case. Little pressure is expected to be exerted upon more radical Islamic organisations by the new government. Gestures will continue to be made toward curbing some limited aspects of overt Islamic militancy, primarily for overseas consumption, but little is expected to be done to dismantle the structures that support such militancy, as this would be seen as an attack on wider Islam.

A FUTURE FOR DEMOCRACY?

When assessing Indonesia's transition to democracy, it is necessary to keep in mind the constraints acting upon it: a lack of democratic history and limited support for the idea among some groups; often corrupt and usually self-serving politicians; a myriad of disparate cultures with local claims to self-determination; and — guaranteeing cohesion to this complex environment — an authoritarian, corrupt and often brutal military.

In one sense then, it does not matter who fills the role of president of Indonesia, because the requirements and limitations of the position would be the same for all candidates. And while Indonesia's unsteady steps towards democratisation — including the direct election of the president — are to be applauded, the systemic problems that exist within the Indonesian political system mean that true democracy is a long way off.

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Pictured: 6 year old Mouhammed Nieneh fled Iraq together with his mother and sister, after his father was arrested by the Iraqi Government. Mouhammed does not remember his father, who was later killed by the Government.

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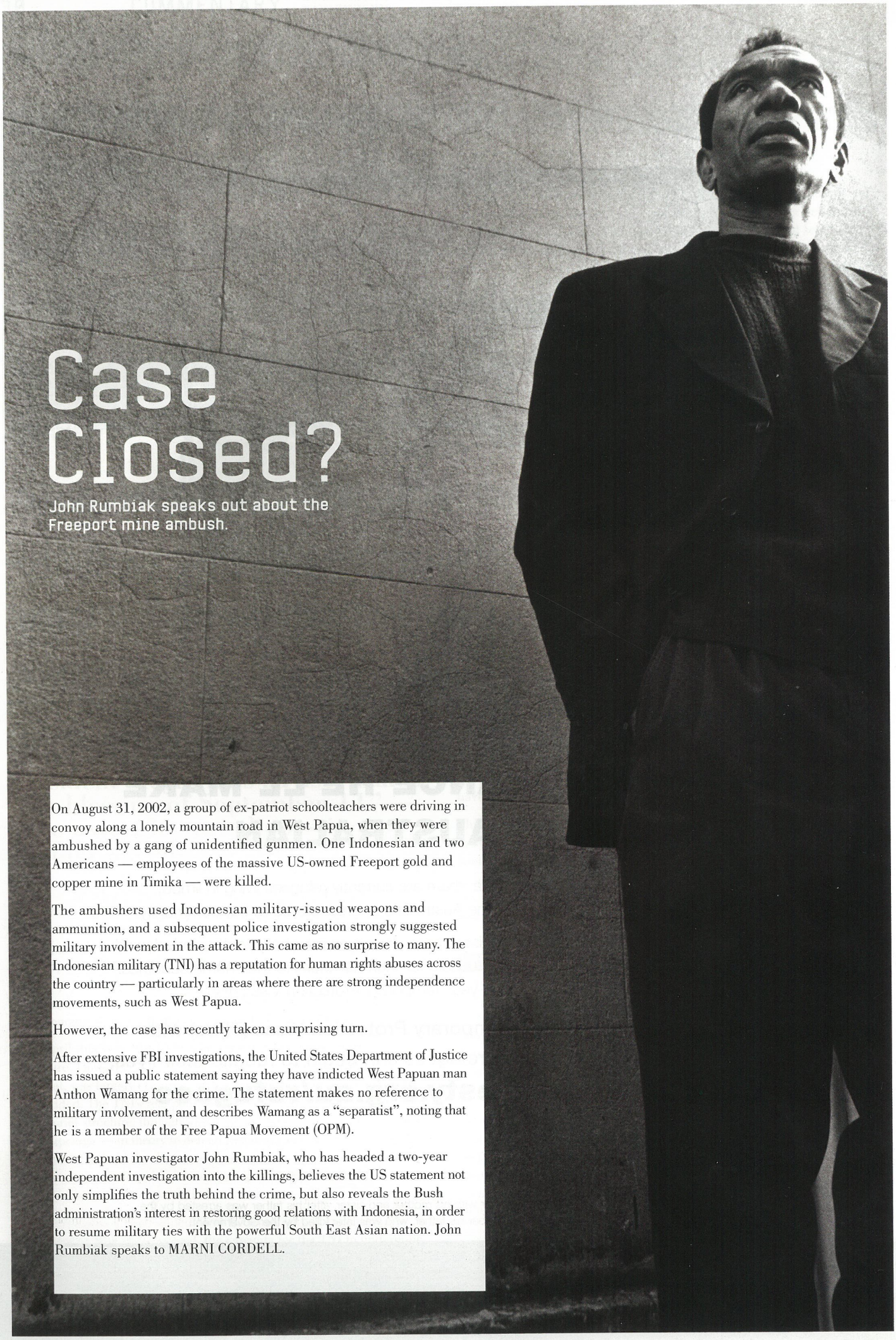
Case Closed?

John Rumbiak speaks out about the Freeport mine ambush.



On August 31, 2002, a group of ex-patriot schoolteachers were driving in convoy along a lonely mountain road in West Papua, when they were ambushed by a gang of unidentified gunmen. One Indonesian and two Americans — employees of the massive US-owned Freeport gold and copper mine in Timika — were killed.

The ambushers used Indonesian military-issued weapons and ammunition, and a subsequent police investigation strongly suggested military involvement in the attack. This came as no surprise to many. The Indonesian military (TNI) has a reputation for human rights abuses across the country — particularly in areas where there are strong independence movements, such as West Papua.

However, the case has recently taken a surprising turn.

After extensive FBI investigations, the United States Department of Justice has issued a public statement saying they have indicted West Papuan man Anthon Wamang for the crime. The statement makes no reference to military involvement, and describes Wamang as a "separatist", noting that he is a member of the Free Papua Movement (OPM).

West Papuan investigator John Rumbiak, who has headed a two-year independent investigation into the killings, believes the US statement not only simplifies the truth behind the crime, but also reveals the Bush administration's interest in restoring good relations with Indonesia, in order to resume military ties with the powerful South East Asian nation. John Rumbiak speaks to MARNI CORDELL.

PHOTO: LOUIS PORTER

Originally from the island of Biak in West Papua, John Rumbiak now lives and works in exile in New York. His role as co-ordinator for international advocacy of ELSHAM, a rights watch organisation, means he can no longer live safely in West Papua. ELSHAM has documented thousands of the human rights abuses that have taken place in Papua since the Indonesian takeover of the province in 1969.

Since September 2002, ELSHAM has been conducting an independent investigation into the Freeport killings, with the aim of ascertaining not only who was behind the attack, but also, says Rumbiak "their motivation — and whether they did it on their own, or if there were others supporting the ambush".

In fact it was to ELSHAM that the indicted Anthon Wamang made his initial confession. "He actually told us two different stories — but one of them was that he and 15 other [Papuan] people were responsible for the attack on the school teachers," says Rumbiak. ELSHAM shared this information with the FBI, who then went to Timika to interview Wamang earlier this year.

Rumbiak says the ELSHAM investigation team has found it extremely difficult to get a straight story from Wamang. It is true that he is a member of the OPM, but they have also spoken to Kelly Kwalik, the area's OPM commander, who maintains that Wamang was not acting under OPM command on the day of the ambush. In fact, ELSHAM has reason to believe that Wamang was co-operating with the military at the time.

There is a long history of military infiltration into separatist groups in Indonesia. It happened in East Timor with Falintil, and still occurs in Aceh with GAM and in Papua with the OPM. "For forty years the military has been infiltrating and manipulating the OPM, paying off corruptive members to be involved in the kidnapping of civilians, so as to justify military operations," says Rumbiak.

The contentious aspect of the US statement on the Freeport killings is that by calling Wamang an OPM member, it implies that the killings were ordered by the OPM — which, according to Rumbiak, there is no evidence to prove.

"He's a member of OPM, but he [also] has personal interests, so if he then decides to join whoever for a certain purpose, [OPM Commander] Kwalik is not in the position to stop him," explains Rumbiak.

"There's no question that some Papuans — whether they are members of OPM or not — do business, and collaborate, with the TNI," he says. "It's all about money issues. People want to eat. They have families, they want to feed them."

"Our investigation is still continuing," he goes on. "We believe that the question of why Anthon did not obey Kwalik's order is a big one. Kwalik didn't order him to attack any human — so why did he do this? The second thing is that he has confessed that he has a very good relationship with the military and is involved in eaglewood and goldpanning business with them — and that he got the ammunition from the military." Based on these facts, Rumbiak says there is good reason to believe that Wamang was not acting alone: "We believe that Anthon did not operate [of his own volition]."

* * *

There are plenty of indicators to suggest military involvement in the crime. One of the most incriminating pieces of evidence found near the scene of the ambush was the body of a Papuan tribesman, dubbed 'Mr X'. The local military claimed the man was one of the ambushers, who had returned the next day to attack them. "When they testified to the police they said that they shot this man on the first of September — the day after the killings," Rumbiak explains.

"But the police took the body to hospital and it was checked. According to the doctor this guy died a couple of hours before the killings. It didn't happen on the first [as was claimed by the military]. So the police conclusion was... they very much suspect the Indonesian military were involved in the attack."

According to Rumbiak, the military have offered no public explanation for this discrepancy: "In Indonesia the police don't have any authority to investigate the military, so the TNI just went in and exonerated themselves."

* * *

The Indonesian Government does not fully fund its military. The TNI depends on external funds from 'protection money', bribes and private business to operate. In this climate, it is not uncommon for the military to commit crimes and blame them on others, thereby reinforcing its own necessity and ensuring more protection money. "It's a long history of the military in Papua, and more specifically, the military at Freeport mine," says Rumbiak. "The history of the military in Papua [needs to be taken into account] when investigating this crime."

Up until July 2002, the TNI enjoyed a healthy mutual relationship with the Freeport mine: the military provided security in the remote Papuan highlands, and Freeport paid well for it. "Financial support from Freeport to the Indonesian military was increasing from year to year," says Rumbiak, "up until July 2002."

Freeport denied for years that it was funding the TNI, and many of the millions of dollars in transactions have not been accounted for in company records. However, in mid-2002, in response to the collapse of Enron and WorldCom, the US Government introduced a bill that demanded greater corporate responsibility. Passed into law on July 26, the Corporate Fraud Act required American companies to prove that their financial accounts were true and accurate. As a US multinational, Freeport was forced to become accountable.

"It used to be that anyone from the military could just pick up the phone, and request anything they wanted... but after July 2002, since these new policies were introduced, there have been tensions between Freeport and the military. In our view, there's got to be something in this," says Rumbiak.

* * *

ELSHAM has worked in close collaboration with the FBI, and Rumbiak believes the bureau's investigation has been thorough. However, in his opinion, the statement released by the US is more aligned the Bush administration's desired outcome for the case, than it is with the results of the FBI investigation. "Since September 11, the Bush administration has been desperate to reinstate military ties with Indonesia," explains Rumbiak.

The United States suspended military aid to Indonesia after the Dili massacre in 1991, and has said it will not resume close military ties until Jakarta helps complete the Freeport investigation.

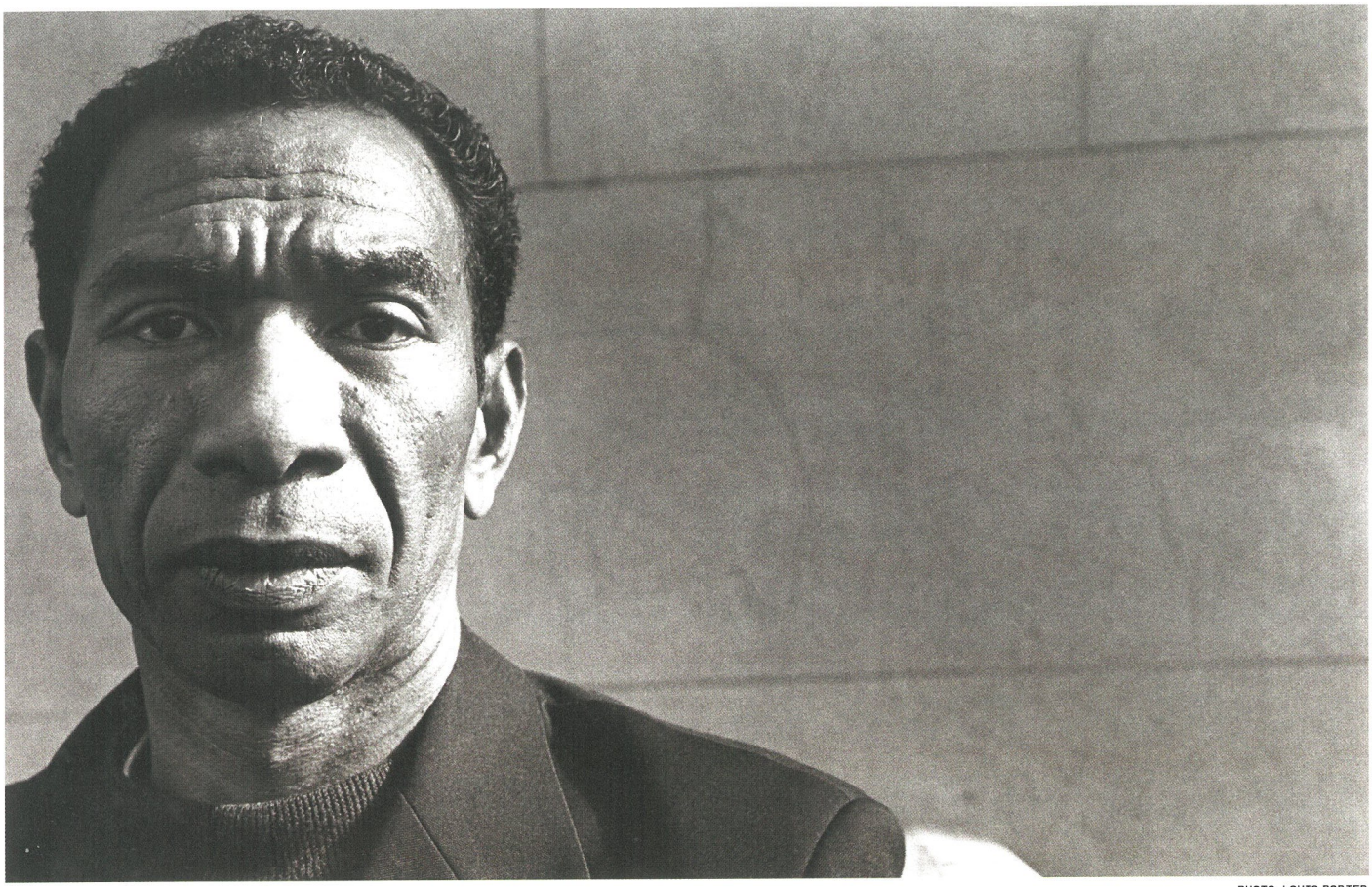


PHOTO: LOUIS PORTER

But Indonesia — as a 'moderate' Muslim country — is seen as a key player in the 'War on Terror', and Bush is keen to resolve the Freeport issue in order to reinstate a joint military program. Any US finding against the TNI could jeopardise this plan.

This is not good enough, says Rumbiak: "The Bush administration has to clarify its statement, by admitting that this guy has a close relationship with the military and that he got the ammunition from the military. And the investigation by the FBI has got to look into command responsibility — the people behind Anthon and their motivations."

* * *

The US Department of Justice statement claims that the Freeport case "is an example of outstanding investigative work... to ensure that those who attack Americans abroad are brought to justice." "Terrorists will find that they cannot hide from US justice," it continues, "whether in the world's largest cities or in the most remote jungles of Asia."

But Rumbiak describes the US statement as "dangerous" for all Papuans. "It doesn't say that the OPM is a terrorist organisation explicitly," he explains, "but... it implies that the OPM is a terrorist group. The Indonesian Government has been trying to declare martial law in Papua for a long time, just as in Aceh, but they've been failing because of the peace campaign in West Papua — this will give them renewed ammunition."

Rumbiak believes the statement also gives an already violent and corrupt military a green light from the international community to interrogate and violate West Papuan citizens. "It's long been the culture of the Indonesian military to go after the Papuans, but with such a statement put in such a way by the US government, now it's very dangerous." In fact, says Rumbiak, Papuan colleagues involved in the ELSHAM investigation are already being intimidated. "It's a long-term ramification that is damaging and that will affect the work of human rights groups — as well as any groups in West Papua that are political."

Rumbiak is concerned that even if the FBI does implicate military members in the attack that — just as in many past cases of TNI abuse and terrorism — "they would be seen as individuals, nothing to do with the big boss: like in the East Timor case, with Eurico Guterres." Guterres was a prominent 'pro-integration' militia leader in East Timor. It is widely known that his campaign of terror was backed and aided by the TNI, but the military blamed 'rogue elements' within the command chain for Guterres' support. Rumbiak is concerned that the military is getting away with the same old tricks all over again.

"That's why I say we have to go after the issue of command responsibility: who was the military commander at the time in West Papua? And then you check every month, how much money he got from Freeport — that would be the way to really look into the motivation behind the attack. Otherwise, it was just a frustrated low ranking officer who got involved with Anthon, who was angry at Freeport because they've exploited his land, and that's it. Period. That's how the OPM and the people around the mine — and West Papuans in general — will be labelled as terrorists."

* * *

Rumbiak is not critical of the FBI investigation team, describing them as "great people". But he is angry that the US statement was released without his consultation. "I said to the FBI: 'look, I respect your integrity, but we are dealing with a political issue here, this is a hot political issue'."

Regardless of the facts, the outcome of the Freeport case will ultimately be up to the US Government. And it's in their best interests to clear the TNI of any blame, in order to resume military ties with Indonesia.

MARNI CORDELL IS CO-EDITOR OF *SPINACH7* MAGAZINE.

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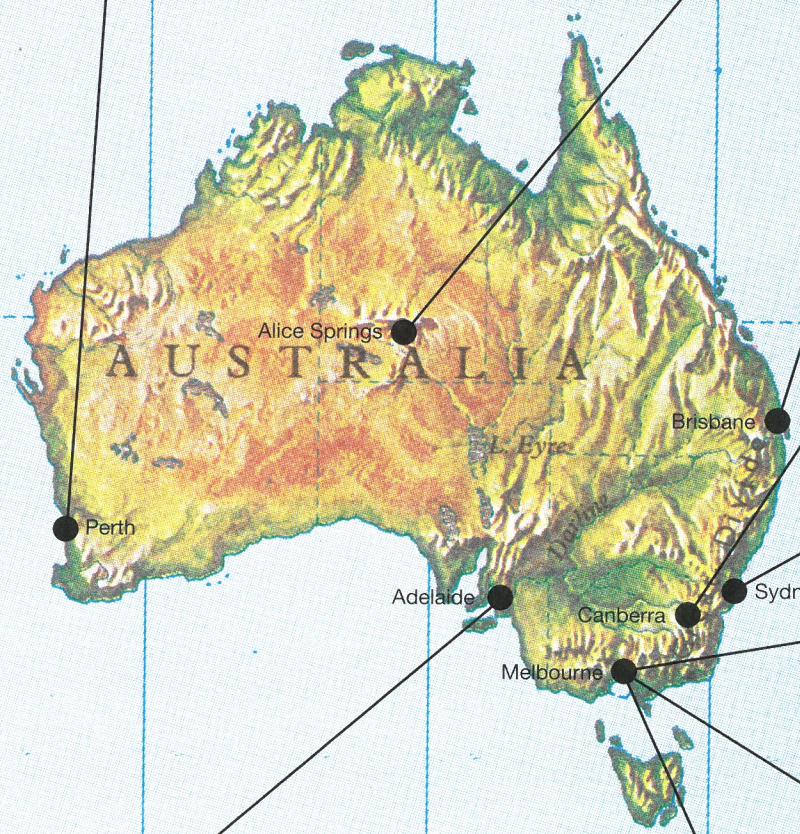

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An Israeli soldier asks a Palestinian civilian for her ID card at the checkpoint entrance to the West Bank town of Nablus. 3 883 people have been killed since the start of the Palestinian uprising in late September 2000, including 2 918 Palestinians and 896 Israelis.

September 1, 2003

SAVAGE PEACE

RUSTY STEWART

A Palestinian woman touches the concrete blocks of the 'security wall' that divides the town of Abu Dis in two — and separates it from Jerusalem. Israel insists it is vital for national security, but for the residents of Abu Dis the wall being built through their backyard is merely a ploy to annex more land, and determine the borders of a future Palestinian state.

August 18, 2003

School children run past an Israeli tank in Nablus, West Bank, on the first day of the new school year. About one million Palestinian students started the new school year in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank.

September 1, 2003

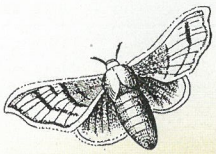
A Jewish settler mourns the death of his friend, an Israeli soldier, in the West Bank town of Hebron. The soldier was killed when the vehicle he was travelling in was attacked by Palestinian fighters.

August 15, 2003

A Palestinian youth pauses during a lull in rioting in the West Bank town of Nablus. Young men battled Israeli troops who entered the town to conduct searches of homes in a section of the Old City.

August 23, 2003

Photojournalist Rusty Stewart has covered conflict and its aftermath in Bosnia, Belfast and East Timor. He made two extended trips to Israel and Palestine between November 2002 and October 2003 to document the implementation of the 'Road Map for Peace'. These images are a selection from his forthcoming photographic exhibition *Savage Peace: Images from a Peace Process*.



Like a Paintbox

TONY BIRCH

I have been writing short fiction and poetry for more than a decade, as well as teaching writing at university. Some of my students feel that I dwell too much on death and loss, while a close friend of mine, who is also a writer, recently told me that in all of my stories someone either dies or goes missing. This is possibly true, although I am not sure.

Recently I showed my students the William Yang film, *Sadness* (1992). It uses monologue and photography to produce stories that both celebrate and interrogate issues of identity and loss. Some segments of *Sadness* are about the deaths of some of Yang's closest friends and former lovers, who have died as a result of contracting HIV and AIDS. Yang opens the film with the comment, "I feel a need to relieve myself of the burden of the things that I have seen."

Some students commented that they did not like *Sadness* because "people die in it". When I feel frustrated with my teaching (as I often do) I expect more from my students than this — 'maturity' or 'empathy' perhaps? But this is unfair of me. After more considered reflection I do think that many of them are uncomfortable about such issues, with some being openly fearful. I understand this. And should not expect anything different.

It is ironic though that we witness death 'with the lot' as a media performance on a daily basis. Fictionalised, stylised death; death from the distance of satellite is readily consumed, but in such a manner that any emotional residue, or deeper contemplation have no time to penetrate the psyche before we move on to the next performance.

But people die in real life. My mother pores over the obituaries each morning. There are hundreds of names there in print — dead names. I do not want to confront my students with issues surrounding death. Nor would I suggest to them that creativity is reliant on 'tragedy' for its muse. I do want to persuade them that mortality informs us about *life*. In my own writing I remain in contact with those who have died not to unburden myself or to dwell with sadness (although there are times when I feel sadness), or to stimulate the creative process. I am motivated more simply to both learn from the experience of loss and continue a life with those people who have informed all that I am and all that I write about.

In the year that I turned twelve my godmother died of cervical cancer. She was young, just 27 years old. I had no understanding of this at the time. She had three young children (all girls), and because of this she could only be old, I thought, as according to my logic all mothers were old. She was also my own mother's younger sister. After her death I spent a lot of time playing with my young cousins along the banks of Merri Creek, near their home, as they dealt with the utter confusion of losing their mother.

I loved my godmother for the emotional warmth she would show toward me, but I was also attracted to her physical beauty. My godmother had a dark head of hair that would shimmer with the light. As a young teenager she won a rock 'n' roll dance marathon. She kept on dancing into adulthood, twisting graceful loops to American and British pop music across lino floors for the pleasure of her audience of young children. Along with my mother, she loved the music of 'girl bands' like the Shangrilas and singers such as Dusty Springfield. The voices of these women filled our small kitchen day and night.

In the years after my godmother's death images of her have revisited me often. They appear like snapshots in a family album. It is how we have kept in touch. When I first watched *Sadness* I was struck by a scene where some of those involved in producing commemoration quilts for those who had died, display their love for the dead through craft and creativity. Several of the quilts celebrate life with splashes of vibrant

I had not realised that my godmother was dying until that moment. She looked as if she were wrapped in a shroud, preparing to leave.

colour. Others, more subtle and understated, resemble shrouds for both the body and soul. As I watched these quilts being unravelled memories of my godmother came to me again. These memories and images were dominated by particular textures and colours.

As a kid watching my mother and godmother spin around the kitchen I would become mesmerised by the streaks of colour filling the room. They each wore the pop uniform of sleeveless print dresses, patterned with either large sprays of full petalled flowers or blocks of wild colour broken by a heavy black grid. For a long time after my godmother's death I remembered her as a paintbox; a palette of colours creating a picture of unreal but wonderfully romántic beauty. This may seem saccharine-laden or nostalgic. I accept this and even savour it as it eases the pain of another image of my godmother absent of romantic embellishment.

In the last months of her life my godmother was in and out of the Royal Women's Hospital being 'treated' with radio and chemotherapy. She lost a lot of weight along with her hair. Several weeks before her death, she asked that we come for a last visit.

I waited to see my godmother on an exposed balcony of a red brick building that then stood on the corner of Grattan and Swanston Streets. It was a wet rainy night. I stood holding my cousin's hand, shivering as my mother went inside to 'prepare' my godmother for us. I wanted to be inside, in the warmth of the room with my godmother.

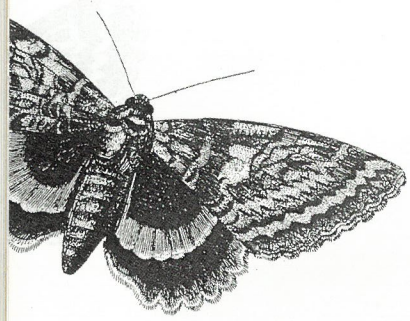
My mother came to the door and called us inside. I have rarely seen fear on my mother's face, but I saw it then as I shuffled past her into the hospital ward. A small army of children stood around my godmother's bed. She had dark rings under her eyes and her cheeks and chin had sunken into her face. A canopy had been placed over her body so the sheet and blankets did not make contact with her skin. My godmother had lost so much weight that any contact with her skin and bone was liable to produce a bruise.

I had not realised that my godmother was dying until that moment. She looked as if she were wrapped in a shroud, preparing to leave. We were each told to kiss her goodbye. After I had kissed her cheek and it was my turn to go I would not leave the bedside. I was frightened for both her and myself. I wanted her to say something to reassure me. Selfishly, I wanted her to ease my fears, to tell me that I would be alright and that somehow she would be also. She said nothing. She just looked at me, panning her eyes across my face and hands (she kept glancing at my hands). My godmother went through this with each of us, wanting to savour the images of those she loved.

I did not realise this as a child at her bedside. I do now. And I know this as I have kept in touch with my godmother, remembering her, mentally conversing with her, accepting that this relationship includes living also with sadness. My ongoing relationship with my godmother also helps me to understand my own mother better. As an adult I am now in awe of a woman who was burdened with the responsibility of masking her own grief so that others could express theirs.

My godmother's death hardened my mother. When she was a young girl her father had committed suicide, while a younger brother, my uncle, was murdered when he was just eighteen and she was twenty-one. I believe that losing her sister was a defining moment for my mother; it was then she decided to cacoon herself emotionally in an attempt to protect herself from pain.

My mother was not particularly religious and never went to church; the legacy of her father's Irish Catholic fanaticism bypassed her but was handed down to her children. We were all Catholic educated. I took it further, by becoming a dutiful altar and choir boy. In the week after my godmother's death I told my mother that I would not be going to church again as I no longer believed in God. She responded with resignation and wearied understanding as she was too emotionally gutted to question



Reflection is vital.

my sudden conversion to atheism. I rarely saw my mother express herself as openly after my godmother's death, dealing with other losses, including the death of another brother to a drug overdose, with an unhealthy resolve.

But the emotional dam could not hold. It burst with the death of her own mother, my grandmother, Alma Marie May, in 1996.

My grandmother had suffered from Alzheimer's disease for several years during her eighties. My mother nursed her every day during this time, feeding and bathing her. They were as physically and emotionally close as a mother and daughter could be. Shortly before her death my grandmother was diagnosed with renal failure. In the final weeks of her life she was admitted to St. Vincent's Hospital, Fitzroy. We did not want to leave her on her own to die, so our extended family operated an informal roster system so that my grandmother could be in our presence.

I spent many afternoons sitting in a window overlooking the streets and laneways of Fitzroy while my grandmother lay in the bed next to me with her face contorted in pain. I had always felt secure in her company, experiencing a metaphysical sensation that I can only explain as allowing my body to 'grow small' in concert with my childlike state of mind. This state of body and mind had continued to affect me even as an adult.

When my grandmother died it was a relief to see the pain leave her face. My mother was not at the hospital when it happened. She was away being 'practical', cleaning out my grandmother's Housing Commission flat in Collingwood, packing everything neatly into cardboard boxes and delivering them to St. Vincent de Paul's.

When she came back to the hospital, I was standing outside my grandmother's room with my older sister. She took my mother in her arms and told her that my grandmother "had gone". My mother looked at her with confusion, asking "gone where?". "She's gone Mum, she's dead."

My mother released herself from my sister's arms, pushed her away, and ran. She headed for the lift, frantically pushing the buttons. The lift did not come. She tried to find the stairs but just kept running around the foyer in confused circles. She was lost. She stopped and looked back at us. For a moment she hardened herself with a look that I had seen many times after my godmother's death. And then she began to cry. Quietly at first, into a clenched fist that she forced into her mouth in an attempt to silence herself. As we walked over to her my mother slid down the wall and sat on the floor, where she howled audibly for the next thirty minutes.

I have hesitated to write about these things within the 'public realm'. I work within an institutional setting where the subjective, let alone displays of personal emotion are frowned upon, if not uncomfortably distained by some urbane critical types, who not surprisingly suffer from emotional and political inertia. But I am losing my concern for such anxieties. Reflection is vital. Whenever I think about my godmother and grandmother I am moved to reflect on the vital importance of everyday acts of emotional connection; the subtle gesture, a slight touch of a loved one, letting them know that you are there for them. And yes, such thoughts have at times stimulated the creative process. But in ways that I hope are celebratory of life.

TONY BIRCH'S WRITING HAS MOST RECENTLY APPEARED IN *OVERLAND*, *AUSTRALIAN HISTORICAL STUDIES* AND *CULTURAL STUDIES REVIEW*. IN 2005 HE WILL PUBLISH *FRAMING FITZROY: LIFE IN A MELBOURNE SUBURB* (SCRIBE AUSTRALIA). HE CURRENTLY TEACHES IN THE CREATIVE WRITING PROGRAM AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE.

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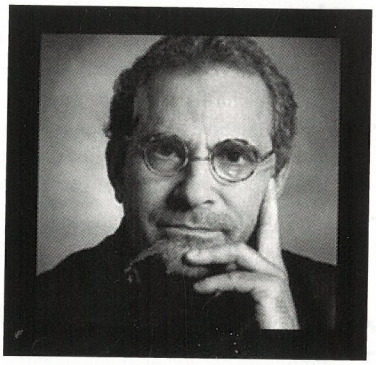
2004 Keynote Address
José Ramos-Horta



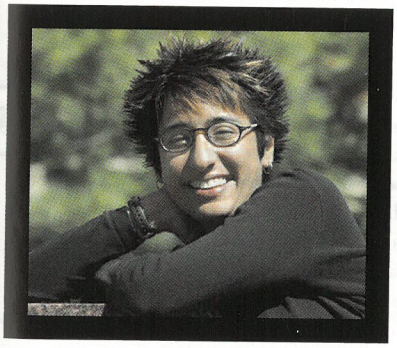
War and Peace, The Middle East and Iraq Cauldrons, Islamic Fundamentalism, Terrorism – Is There Hope?

In a very special event, **José Ramos-Horta**, Nobel Peace Prize Laureate and East Timorese Minister for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation, will open this year's Age Melbourne Writers' Festival delivering the keynote address at the Melbourne Town Hall beginning at 8 pm on **Friday August 20**.

"It seems that we are in a long-protracted war of attrition between moderates the world over and extremists. We will see more violence and death. This will escalate. Before long we will see the use of chemical and biological weapons sooner or later. Thousands will be killed by the evil weapons concocted by the rich and powerful.

For the pacifists, there is one simple solution – we must engage all in diplomacy and dialogue. For the realists, there is another option – the use of force if and when necessary. The current US administration (and Israel) has chosen the war path in dealing with its perceived enemies. Realistically, do we have other options?"

José Ramos-Horta's views on these pressing issues are not to be missed.



The Last Word
Irshad Manji

Confessions of a Muslim Reformer: Why I Fight for Women, Jews and Pluralism

Irshad Manji, author of *The Trouble with Islam*, and a recipient of Oprah Winfrey's First Annual "Chutzpah Awards," will present The Last Word at the Melbourne Town Hall at 8pm on **Sunday, August 29**.

Irshad Manji describes herself as 'a Muslim voice of reform'. "But I remain a hugely ambivalent Muslim because of what's happening "on the ground" – massive human rights violations, particularly against women and religious minorities – in the name of Allah."

Irshad says her book "shatters our silence." "It shows Muslims how we can re-discover Islam's lost tradition of independent thinking – a tradition known as 'ijtihad' – and re-discover it precisely to update Islam for the 21st century. The opportunity to update is especially available to Muslims in the West, because it's here that we enjoy precious freedoms to think, express, challenge and be challenged without fear of state reprisal. In that sense, the Islamic reformation begins in the West."

For a full guest list, program of events, ticketing and other information please visit

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BOOKS

COLUMN

Sometimes Book Critics Are Electric Chairs.

CATFORD COLES does her best to explain.

In the 1960s a poet called Raymond Queneau was (probably) sitting at his typewriter swearing as he tried to write a poem called 'One Hundred Thousand Billion Sonnets'. He asked a mathematician, Francois Le Lionnais for help, and together they decided to form a group interested in the intersection between literature and mathematics. Nerds! The OuLiPo or the Ouvrior de Litterature Potentielle which — loosely translated — means 'Sewing Circle of Potential Literature' was born.

Oulipan writers believe that self-imposed constraints stimulate creativity; they describe themselves as "rats who build the labyrinth from which they propose to escape". They love anagrams, lipograms and aleatoric artforms. Italo Calvino is in the gang and Jorge Luis Borges has been known to sneak a fag with them behind the sports shed.

The classic example of an Oulipan text is Georges Perec's 1969 *La Disparition (A Void)* a novel written entirely in French without the letter 'e'. Then Perec wrote another novel where the only vowel was 'e'. He also kept an inventory of everything he ate in 1974. This year *The Train To Nowhere*, a novel by a French academic Michel Thaler was published. It contains no verbs. Oulipan constraints take many forms!

The Oulipans also invented the S+7 method, where each noun in a given text, is systematically replaced by the noun to be found seven places away from it in a chosen dictionary. So the title of this article might be: Somnambulate Booking Criticaster Arenaceous Electric Flux.

But are the Oulipan books any good? Oulipan texts can read more like writing exercises than narratives. *The Train To Nowhere* was dismissed by critics for (predictably) lacking action, but the works of the notable Oulipan polymaths cannot be dismissed. Although Perec based the structure of his novel *Life: A User's Manual* on a chess board and the movements of the knights, it has broad appeal and won the Prix Medicis (the biggest French literary award) in 1978. By abandoning their habits Queneau, Perec, Calvino, Borges and co. have reinvented language. One Oulipan puts it, "Thus arises the paradox … of linguistic constraint: far from blocking imagination, its arbitrary demands awaken it, stimulate it, and permit it to ignore all those other constraints that, being unrelated to language, are harder to control." According to another, constraints "serve to destroy the much-cherished myth of 'inspiration', and its idiot brother, 'writer's block'".

If you look beyond what some view as a literary gimmick, you find serious reasons for Oulipo's existence. Perec's mother disappeared during the Jewish Holocaust, some people think this explains his obsession with disappearing letters, and themes of loss. And Queneau became interested in setting up Oulipo after a split with the Surrealists. The conscious constraints of the Oulipan system could be seen as a direct challenge to the Surrealists' view that the unconscious is where art is at.

Oulipo hasn't restricted itself to literature. There is the OuCuiPo — The Workshop For Potential Cooking. (For example: cook an entire meal using only red ingredients.) It has a modern mutation too: OuBaPo — The Workshop For Potential Comics — was founded in France in 1992 and applies constraints to the writing and drawing of comics. Some of these were adapted from the Oulipian constraints (eg. the S+7 method), while others were made with comics in mind, think MAD magazine fold-out on eccies. And perhaps this whole Oulipo thing has interesting political implications. If you can't use the letter 'a' you can't write 'man' and instead will be forced to opt for 'people'; sexist conventions are rendered impossible.

I want to finish by saying that there are writers out there who have written under real constraints, not those imposed by the inebriated poin dexter standing next to the dip at the party. A classic example of literature born out of real constraint is *Sacco and Vanzetti*, edited by John Davis and recently published by Ocean Press. It contains the prison writings of two Italian immigrants, a shoemaker and a fish peddler, who were imprisoned for a murder they did not commit during the red scare in 1920s America. They were framed, not only because they were an ethnic minority, but also because they were anarchists. *Sacco and Vanzetti* is a collection of both letters and statements by the pair, as well as reflections on their legacy by the likes of Emma Goldman and historian Howard Zinn.

Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti were in jail for seven years before being sent to the electric chair.

CATFORD COLES IS CONTEMPLATING WRITING A NOVEL WITHOUT THE LETTER 'S'. SHE ALSO WRITES A REGULAR COLUMN FOR SPINACH7.

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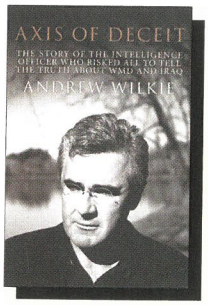
REVIEW



Axis of Deceit
Andrew Wilkie
Black Inc Books

About half way through *Axis of Deceit* I realised that its author is the sort of person that doesn't exist any more. Andrew Wilkie is a relic of an era of sacrifice and service handed down through generations of a military family. Wilkie's stance against the war in Iraq and the politicisation of the military and intelligence communities is less informed by the sloganeering of an activist, than admirable traditional conservative values of duty, integrity, self sacrifice and honour. This country is all the better for it, even if it is a character we haven't seen much of it since the movies were both morally and literally black and white.

The moral certainty of its protagonist is the only black and white element in *Axis of Deceit*. Schooled in the world of intelligence with its uncertainties, contradictions and ambiguities Wilkie doesn't attempt to reduce the Iraq war to a simple "Saddam is evil" or "it's all about the oil" summary.

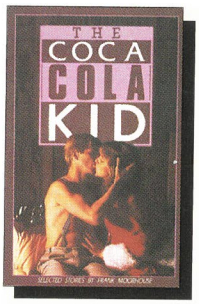
His arguments are complex. In his world Iraq under Saddam Hussein was bad and the motivations behind the war were varied. Wilkie's source of outrage is that nothing he ever saw — including the intelligence assessments of all the leading nations in the 'coalition of the willing' — added up to a justification for taking Iraqi lives or risking Australian ones against the will of the international community. Furthermore, he knows our government knew that and that they manipulated the entire intelligence apparatus to achieve their political ends.

In the face of this inconvenient lack of justification, Wilkie documents in meticulous detail how the Australian, British and American governments sought to systematically lie and deceive. "All it took … was for politicians and their advisers to omit a few words like 'uncorroborated evidence suggests' and insert a word or two like 'massive', " in order to turn an uncertain but relatively unthreatening situation into the mother of all threats.

Wilkie is no Michael Moore. He writes as though he believes the simple presentation of the facts is enough to inspire outrage with no need for embellishment. It is. The war was, in his opinion, "The Big Lie" and *Axis of Deceit* exposes it comprehensively, relatively dispassionately and with all the straightforward efficiency of a well-written intelligence assessment.

The only disappointment of this book is that it is not, as proclaimed on the cover, "The story of the intelligence officer who risked all to tell the truth about WMD and Iraq." You get the distinct impression that Wilkie doesn't much enjoy talking about himself and would rather get to the point. And the point is not his own transformation. The journey from Army Lieutenant Colonel, to Senior Analyst for the Office of National Assessments, to a whistleblower willing to quit in protest against a fictitious war, and ultimately the Greens candidate in John Howard's seat of Bennelong is one hell of a story. However, it's not this story.
MARCUS WESTBURY

CULT READ



The Coca-Cola Kid
Selected Stories by Frank Moorehouse
Angus and Robertson
1982

In a late-90s interview with *Cinema Papers*, Frank Moorehouse tells it that: "In 1960 I was a restless, uncomfortably married, young, D-grade reporter in Wagga Wagga. My wife and I went to a party at the Boat Club put on by the Young Liberals. … It was a come-as-a-bohemian party. … I'd left the city to escape Bohemia. [My costume] was in my luggage." At the party Moorehouse met an American Coca-Cola executive from Atlantis, who was in Australia to propagate local Coca-Cola franchises. Moorehouse, then a socialist, picked an "obligatory argument" but later admitted he found the executive "more interesting than anyone else in the party". (Considering we are talking a 60s regional Young Liberal shin-din, I dunno that there was much competition.) But Moorehouse makes the point that Australian writers and creators all too easily dismiss and stereotype the business community, Young Liberals having a good time at Yacht Clubs and their ilk. To Moorehouse this is an "imaginative deficit"; he would like to see more of an effort to understand the lives, energies, creativity and malaise of "these people".

Meet Becker, the Coca-Cola kid.

Becker is looking for new horizons, b ut he does not enjoy life on the frontier: the neck-burning sun, the flies, the spiky paddocks and the transvestites. Becker is a believer — not in Empire but in the ice-cold soft drink itself. Becker has an evangelical belief in Coke, and he's out to convert. Okay so maybe he believes in Empire too. "Becker Sucks Cocks" according to graffiti scrawled by Terri (his secretary / lover) on the mirror in a bathroom of a business associate whose party Terri attends in bare feet and a Women's Lib T-Shirt. Becker plays jazz piano, tenderly. Becker is complex.

This collection of discontinuous stories centre around Becker, Terri and her father T.G. McDowell — who in the morality tale movie version of *The Coca-Cola Kid* runs a local homemade soft drink company literally guarded from Coca-Colonisation. Moorehouse likes guns, and knives too. His work has a dangerous edge.

On a recent speaking tour of Australia, political commentator Tariq Ali expressed his shock at the *level* of Australia's servility to the US. Set in the early 70s *The Coca-Cola Kid* can be loosely read as a document of an Australian society and culture that — despite Vietnam —is still worlds away from America and intensely wary; sometimes because of ignorance, other times political awareness. Ultimately, in this version, it's Becker that's seduced and subsumed: the executive eventually comes undone. Moorehouse certainly didn't set out to write a parable — nothing so simple — but the flirtations, pulls and resistances in this work make it a particularly interesting read in the contemporary context. Also *The Coca-Cola Kid*, like so much of Moorehouse's writing, is bloody funny.
EVE VINCENT

MUSIC

PHOTO: SHOCK RECORDS

Tinariwen — Survivors of the Sahara

The 'protest song' is about as close as popular Western music comes to contemplating warfare and its effects. It's an intellectualised response — perhaps pure in conviction — but detached by place, by context, by perspective. Branded 'war-poets' by western music press, southern Saharan blues band Tinariwen bring the link between music and battle frighteningly close.

After decades of cultural and geographic dislocation due to war and a hostile environment, Tinariwen ('The group of the deserts') tell the story of the kel Tamashek people through searing guitar hooks, fractured percussion and haunting, sinuous vocals.

Their music represents a powerful exchange — traditional poetic and music practices meet contemporary guitar craft, blues and rock. Ideologies, born through a history of warfare and hardship, infuse and inform modern realities. A story is told — of the old and the new, of tradition and adaptation.

Founding members Ibrahim Ag Alhabib and Aihousseini Abdallah give DAN RULE their version.

It's night in the southern Sahara, and a strong desert wind is blowing. The date is June 29,1990. Approximately half way between the Niger border and the Malian military post of Menaka, a small, temporary camp is set up, and guitars can just be made-out over the thrashing of the tarpaulins.

Sheltered in a makeshift tent — erected with old branches and rope — a group of Tamashek men sit by a small fire. Guitars and voices swell within the ballooning walls — riffs stab amongst clustering rhythms and vocals. One of the men with guitars is Kheddou Ag Hossad. He glances around the walls of the tent, then back at the fire. Tonight he plays the music of his homeland and his displaced people. Tomorrow he will engage in the initial skirmish of the second Tamashek rebellion against the Malian state.

The image of him attacking the Menaka post — electric guitar strapped to his back, Kalashnikov machinegun in hand — will become legendary, and many years later people will still speak of it at any mention of Tinariwen, the band he helped found.

But fellow founding member Ibrahim is cautious when it comes to such symbolism. As he explains, the idea of the 'war-poet' is one that the group

approaches tentatively. "Poetry has played many roles in our society and has spoken of many things: conflict, love, friendship, family, environment. Poetry was never confined to war, and our songs have never only spoken about conflict and rebellion."

"Kheddou did carry his guitar with him during some of the actions," he continues. "You had to be on the move a lot, so it was natural. We never really promoted war with our music, only the idea that sometimes, when your rights are being denied and your culture ignored, the only option left is to fight."

Resilience has long characterised kel Tamashek culture. Dubbed the 'Touareg' people (an Arabic word meaning 'Abandoned by God') by West Africa's former French colonisers, the kel Tamashek were bound to a life of nomadic pastoralism based around looking after animals such as camels, goats and cattle. They traditionally travelled huge distances: as their animals stripped each pasture they moved on to find a new location for grazing.

Abdallah reflects that there was a time when rains were plentiful and the pastures rich. But the kel Tamashek people's fortunes shifted with the great drought of 1973–74. "The rains didn't come and most of the animals died," he says. "It happened again in 1986. These were terrible years for the kel Tamashek." These droughts were just part of a series of ecological disasters that have since threatened to completely destroy their traditional way of life.

The Touareg label has survived for reasons other than the weather. A bloody history of warfare and oppression at the hands of the Malian state — a region which covers much of the kel Tamashek's traditional pastoral grounds — has contributed to the dislocation of huge numbers of kel Tamashek tribes-people. After the French relinquished control of the region and accepted Malian independence in 1960, the Tamashek soon found themselves in conflict with the new Malian government, who represented the Bambara ethnic majority. "When the Bambara people took over the government of Mali after independence, they had no time for the people of the northern desert regions," says Ibrahim. "They weren't interested in our language, our way of life, our needs, or our aspirations. For them we were just people to be counted and taxed. But why should a nomad pay taxes when he takes nothing from anyone or anything except the earth around him? The central government of Mali made no effort to develop our region and only sent us tax inspectors and soldiers," he recounts. "Whenever our fathers or uncles protested, they were very brutally treated, and this created extremely bad feelings."

In the years following the first kel Tamashek rebellion of 1963–64, large numbers of tribes-people fled to neighbouring countries such as Algeria and Niger to seek refuge. But it was further west, in a Libyan military camp established to train refugees from nearby countries, where numerous disenfranchised kel Tamashek men later found themselves. Tinariwen originally formed in this context — guitars and amplifiers were bought for them by their commanders — to help communicate the message of the Tamashek people to the Malian government, up until the second rebellion of 1990.

The idea of Tinariwen being a propaganda tool makes Abdallah less than comfortable. "You must understand that there were no newspapers, no radio stations, no television stations, no books and certainly no internet in the desert a few years ago, so music was the main tool to raise awareness and educate people about their situation and what can be done to improve it."

"It's true that the leaders of the rebel movement did realise at one time that Tinariwen could be useful in transmitting the message to Touareg people who were scattered far and wide throughout Lybia, Algeria and Mali," he admits. "But that was never the only reason why the band existed. Some of the songs are very personal, and very emotional, and very little to do with war or with propaganda."

The personal and nostalgic nature of Tinariwen's lyrical message, combined with their sharp, dirty guitar-licked musical sensibilities, has resulted in numerous comparisons to American blues music by Western music press. But as Ibrahim explains, the band had never even really heard blues music until touring Europe a few years ago. "American blues originally came from Africa, and from nearby to the Niger river, which is where we come from. There must be a historical link, but for us it was never conscious. We have a word in our culture — 'assouf' — which means nostalgia, pain, suffering. It seems like this word is very close to the word 'blues'."

Despite now having a heavy touring schedule, which has seen them travel extensively throughout Europe and Africa, plus a much talked-about visit to Australia for the *WOMADelaide* festival earlier this year, Tinariwen still feel the strength of their link to the homeland, in their "heart" and in their "bones". For Abdallah, the desert means both solitude and community. "Some of the experiences that we have lived through — of drought, exile and rebellion — have been very hard and can create a sense of being alone, of suffering alone. But the desert is also the place where our families and friends spend a lot of time, and live a very communal life."

Since returning permanently to their homelands in 1996 after Mali's transition to democracy and the historic Flame of Peace in Timbuktu (where rebel weapons were voluntarily handed over for incineration), Tinariwen have been joined by numerous younger members — Sarid, Eyadou, Elaga and Mina —and have worked to modify their message to encompass contemporary realities. "The kel Tamashek must live in the modern world like everyone else," Abdallah states bluntly. "They must understand the value of education for example, which is very important for us, as it is for people throughout the world. It is the weather and the environment that will dictate whether the traditional nomadic life can survive, but it's certain that not all the Touaregs can go back to living the traditional life now. They must learn how to survive in towns and cities, away from their homes and families."

This is reflected in the song 'Arawan', which tells the tragic story of a lost Tamashek village, but then begs for an understanding of the ease of city life and the modern agricultural system — "So what mysteries make the water flow so abundantly in their city / and even more so in their fields."

"The challenge is to rebuild society," explains Abdallah, "a society which respects traditions, but which also has no fear of the modern world and can survive in it. It's a great challenge, but we cannot fail. Too much depends on it."

Tinariwen's second album Amassakoul *is available in Australia through Shock Records.*

DAN RULE IS THE MUSIC EDITOR OF *THE BIG ISSUE* MAGAZINE, AND A FOUNDING MEMBER OF INDEPENDENT ART PUBLISHERS THE *AND COLLECTIVE*.

MUSIC

Ill School Teacher

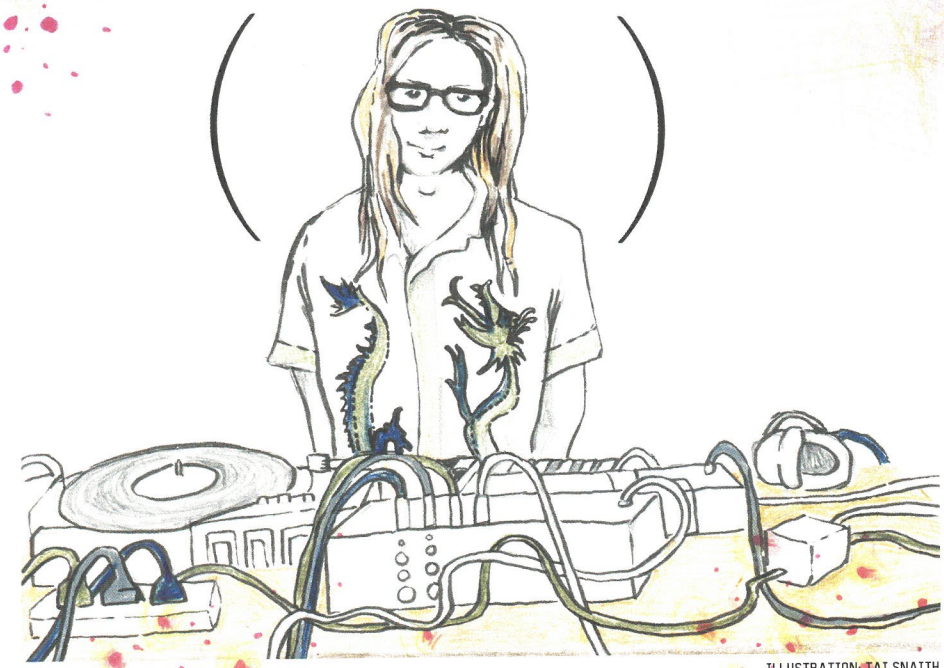


ILLUSTRATION: TAI SNAITH

The students at the rock'n'roll school at Darwin High describe him as the "ill school teacher". At his Cape York hip hop workshops FUBU-clad MCs-in-the-making beat box with the best. Somehow he also finds time to release hilariously incendiary hip hop as Toe-Keo and "mopey indie songs" as Blastcorp.

MATT LEVINSON catches up with Kris Keogh.

The sight of Kris weaving his way through a crowd of pedestrians at last year's *This Is Not Art* (TINA) festival in Newcastle is firmly imprinted on my memory: long dreadlocks jutting out, limbs flailing wildly, the roar of skateboard wheels and his disarmingly friendly grin.

Kris grew up in the little mining town of Nhulunbuy in Arnhem Land. "Imagine a country town dropped in the middle of nowhere, with just trees for 500 kilometres." But it was more than "just trees," and the strained relations between Nhulunbuy and the neighbouring Aboriginal community of Yirrkala — 15 kilometres away — affected him profoundly. "It was very segregated," he says. "White people lived and worked here, and Aboriginal people lived and worked somewhere else."

"I was still in the mainstream of Austraya!" he exclaims. "I hammered my Commodore 64 and listened to Def Leppard and Poison." But there were no two-lane roads, traffic lights or roundabouts and only a single set of shops.

In 1994 Kris moved to Darwin to study at the Northern Territory University. He found Darwin a "multicultural place, everyone's a different nationality and it's small so you tend to meet the most random people." He'd never even caught a bus before so the culture shock was pretty intense.

After stumbling on electronic music care of a Warp Records sampler, he soon found his feet. He started hanging out with the Vibe Tribe crew on their annual dry season trips and hooked up with Yothu Yindi's keyboard player, Marineboy.

'John Howard is a Filthy Slut' was the provocatively titled result of his 2002 collaboration with Byron Williams (Toe-fu from The Herd). "I always thought rap music wasn't for me. But in the protests after September 11, 2001 I realised that no one really listens to a speech. But if you put a beat behind it, make it rhyme and a bit funny, then they start to listen." It earned the duo plenty of Triple J airplay as well as the infamy of being banned by Rage. "I got the Karma Sutra books and stuck John Howard and George Bush's heads on each other and wiggled 'em around. Shock value is what I was after, but maybe I went a bit far."

Although he sees his other project, Blastcorp, as little more than "Smashing Pumpkins b-sides over Oval," they've struck a cord with fans around the country. Plaintive songs like 'Thousand Miles Away' are truly touching; while the crunchy electronics create a melancholy mood comparable to Clue To Kalo and Schneider TM. "A couple of years ago, I got into lots of girl trouble and got very sad. I got the guitar out and wrote lots of songs. I think after seeing Superscience in Newcastle one year it just seemed to click that you can make weird music and put pop songs to it."

"The only problem with that is, it's kind of fashionable," he says, "or going out of fashion, you know living in Darwin you're always behind the fashions."

A few years on from his Bachelor of Music and he's teaching at Darwin High School. Although he gets into trouble with the other teachers for encouraging young hoods to learn rapping and art (which they then use to graff up the school), his students love him. "Kids come from all around Darwin for one day a week to learn a bit of music theory, how to record, write songs, put on and play a gig, and by the end of the year you try to get these kids releasing something."

Keen to get out in the bush and get a grip on where he'd grown up, Keogh and Williams have taken hip hop workshops to places like Cape York. Starting around the same time as Sydney MC Morganics' *All You Mob* project, with a little funding from schools or local councils, they packed up an old record player, keyboard, sampler, drum machines and a computer, and headed out to the bush for a few weeks at a time.

Last year, Keogh and a couple of others started the *Elements Hip Hop Festival* as a way to give kids a chance to get up and MC, learn to use microphones and see some of the best hip hop groups in the country. This year they got The Herd, Koolism and Maya Jupiter up to Darwin with a meagre $2000 in funding. But after great feedback across the board (especially from the kids), the local government has offered increased funding for next year.

Kris Keogh isn't leaving Darwin any time soon — it's not warm enough in Sydney or Melbourne for this northerner. So keep an eye out for a limited run release of the new Blastcorp album, *Chrysanthemum* — featuring a second disc of remixes and handmade packaging — in coming months. Blastcorp will play live at the TINA festival in Newcastle in October this year. And Toe-Keo is featured on the *Rock Against Howard* compilation available in shops around the country.

MATT LEVINSON IS A CANBERRA-BASED MUSIC WRITER.

SLIPPERY FINGER
Slippery Finger EP
(Independent Release)

This is a four track EP of dark electro pop from a Melbourne producer who draws on so many influences that it would be impossible for me to describe it without sounding like a tool. It's kind of Tricky meets Nina Simone meets slinky sci-trancy-house.

See? Read that sentence over.

Regardless, this is a hot disc. Slippery Finger finds a singer, records a sexy pop song and then cuts it up and twists it into a dark, writhing epiphany.

And the album has got nothing on his live show. Using a computer and synthesizer, Slippery Finger cuts up his tunes in a continuous break down and mash-up of his own songs and others, interspersed with deranged drug-addled freestyles.

Normally I'm ultra-cynical about the whole DJ-Producer thing but this guy is worth it. The name is suspect, but the stuff is gold.
LIAM PIEPER

VARIOUS METAL HEADS
Probot
(Southern Lord)

While heavy metal T-shirts currently feature in every film starring a Drew Barrymore wannabe, Probot is a refreshingly gutteral interlude in the chic–rock–poser resurgence. The Probot project was initiated by Dave Grohl (Nirvana, Foo Fighters) and features a parade of metal heroes including Lemmy (Motorhead), Max Cavalera (Sepultura), and Lee Dorian (Napalm Death) performing songs written by Grohl. It's easy to have misgivings about a project of this type but something on this record makes it click. Perhaps it's the raw intensity of Max Cavalera's voice on 'Red War' or the hilarity of a metal environmental anthem with 'Silent Spring': "They started to die/ but not fast enough/ So they shot at each other/ With bullets and stuff."

Turn it up and slam your way to metal ecstasy.
MARIAN PRICKETT

CHROMEO
She's In Control
(Turbo Recordings/v2)

White kids in the late 80s Canadian TV show, Degrassi Junior High were either nerds or preps. Then, there were the fresh kids, like B.L.T. and Joey Jeremiah. Electro duo, Chromeo, from Quebec, are kinda like the fresh kids, recalling 80s pop where analog synths and talk boxes were the chosen weapons.

Taking their cue from techno-funk (Prince, Klymaxx), Chromeo prance through a cross-fire of guitar and keyboard on their debut LP. The electro beats take prime position; no need to look for lyrical genii here, a fact evidenced by song titles such as 'She'z N Control'.

Many fresh kids may shoot down Chromeo for hanging with the electroyalty (Tiga, Adult and Playgroup) but this band ain't got no pretensions. As the press release quips, this is the first successful Arab and Jew partnership (yes, really) who just want to have a bit of fun. So, let them have their way with you.
SHELLY L.

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DIGITAL MEDIA

What's in a Game?

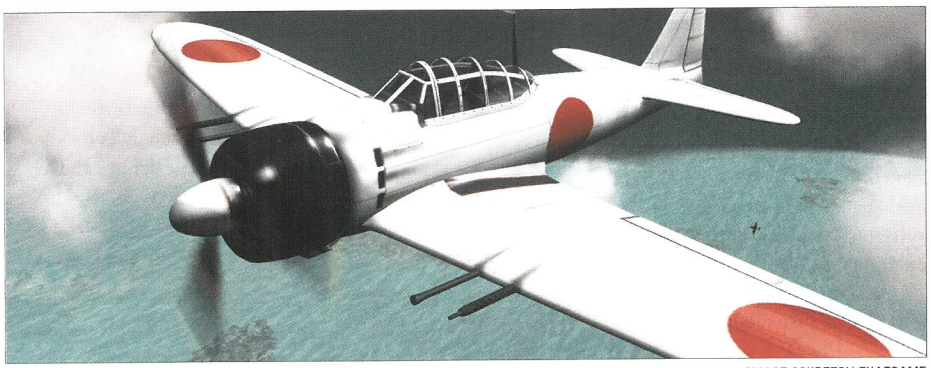


IMAGE COURTESY THATGAME

According to the Game Developers Association of Australia (GDAA), the global game market is worth A$40.9 billion annually. It's a massive market that's only getting bigger, and the Australian game industry wants a slice of it. Already, $100 million in products and services are exported annually, and the Victorian Government has chipped in with funding to help boost this figure to $1 billion by 2010. Victorian-based companies are growing rapidly and according to the GDAA, there's not enough experienced staff to meet the current demand.

The key to a successful game development company is in "owning the IP", says Mike Fegan, CEO of game developer IR Gurus. IP is industry speak for Intellectual Property. Fegan's company is responsible for *AFL Live*, the game series that has topped the local sales charts. Later this year, the technology behind the AFL games will be used to create a Gaelic football game for the Irish market. "The stadium-based sports technologies that we have developed allow us to develop other team sport games," says Fegan, to illustrate his point. The company (in conjunction with Melbourne-based Thatgame) has also secured funding from the Victorian Government to create a prototype of *Heroes of the Pacific* — an arcade simulation game of air battles during World War Two. "We wanted to create something that would sell significant units on a global market", says Fegan.

But not everyone is excited by where the game industry is heading. Luke Taylor, who is involved with the controversial game *Escape from Woomera*, also works in the industry and says of his day job: "we might as well be making widgets". Taylor believes the government is focusing too heavily on fostering industry, and not supporting innovation in gaming. "We also need money for research and development — not just technical development — but R and D into the content and game play."

Taylor believes the potential of games to contribute to Australia's cultural life is huge. Australians spend around $2.3 million every day on computer games, about the same as what is spent daily on going to the movies. "People are turning off their TVs and playing games… we should care about the quality of the games they play," he says.

At the moment, most supported games development in Australia is about 'shifting units' in an export market. "The game industry is focused on developing for the global market," says the GDAA's Evelyn Richardson. "Our objective is to create a larger, vibrant industry which employs our local talent to create and market world class games."

But Taylor believes the Australian industry is on a fast track to Hollywood: "we need to care about culturally worthy projects, not just the bottom line." SAM DE SILVA

Funding for game development from Film Victoria's Digital Media Fund
http://www.film.vic.gov.au/dmf/
Australia and New Zealand Game Developer Launchpad
http://www.sumea.com.au
Escape from Woomera
http://www.escapefromwoomera.org
Multimedia Victoria's Game Industry Initiatives
http://www.mmv.vic.gov.au/games/

The City of Churches Gets Enlightened

PHOTO: KIRSTEN BRADLEY

Luminosity is a recent public art initiative of the Adelaide City Council focusing on site-specific video projection. Over the next four months, five commissioned temporal and un-alloyed artworks will be projected on, in and around Adelaide CBD's windows, walls and crevices. *Luminosity* has kicked off with 'Temporary Lodgings', a work by internationally acclaimed artist Craig Walsh in which the side-wall of the Target building becomes… well, a target. Co-ordinated by the Australian Network for Art and Technology (ANAT), the initiative also involved a projection master class for South Australian artists, which resulted in the commissioning of three further works by James Guerts, Shoot Collective and Jennifer Lyons-Reid with Carl Kuddell. These works will enlighten Adelaide during the SALA festival, which runs from June 30 until August 8. The program will finish up with a final interactive projection work by Cicada from late August until late September.
KIRSTEN BRADLEY

http://www.anat.org.au/luminosity

Animated World Tales

Urashima Taro by Donna Kendrigan

Weaver and Herder by Kyunghee Gwon

Two years ago, SBS Radio sent a call-out to listeners to share their favourite folk tales from childhood. They received a flood of stories originating from diverse corners of the globe, passed down through generations on grandmothers' laps and around the dinner table. The listeners were asked to explain the cultural and personal significance of their stories, and the context in which they were told. SBS selected 20 of the best and then commissioned 20 emerging Victorian animators to visually translate them.

Aiming to showcase Victoria's multimedia industry as well as supporting new animation talent, the *World Tales* project facilitated collaborations across artistic media, and provided the infrastructure to achieve a high standard of production. For the animators, it was an invaluable opportunity to work outside the isolated studio environment and collaborate with professional script editors, creative directors, musicians and narrators, and to bounce ideas around with peers.

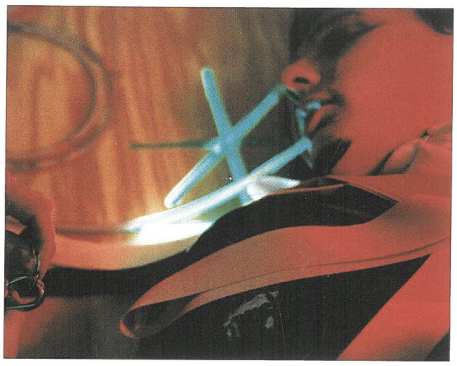
SBS multilingual radio broadcasters and members of Melbourne's migrant communities narrated the series of 4–5 minute animations in both English and the language of the stories' origins.

The animations span a myriad of methods and styles, from the clean vector graphics of Flash, to rotoscoping, textured and layered work using After Effects, 3D modelling, and traditional stop-motion using 16mm film. The animators were given artistic licence in interpreting the tales, provided that they retained the essence of the story and the core plot. This brought about some unexpected results, such as *The Traitor Friend*, a tale of tested loyalties in which a couple of friends are confronted by a bear in the woods. Transposed onto an American Summer Camp setting in a schlock teen horror style, the final product has fundamentally the same narrative, yet takes on a humorous modern slant.

Produced for television and the web, the animations are shown in full online — along with interactive components such as games and activities. Each story is also presented in its initial form, accompanied by its historical and cultural background, and similar folk tales that reveal the archetypal, universal thread of understanding that connects storytelling of this type around the world. ADELE WILKES

World Tales *screens on SBS television from the beginning of July, and is online from August 12.*

PROFILE: Sam Smith Digital Manipulator



Still from *Set Piece*

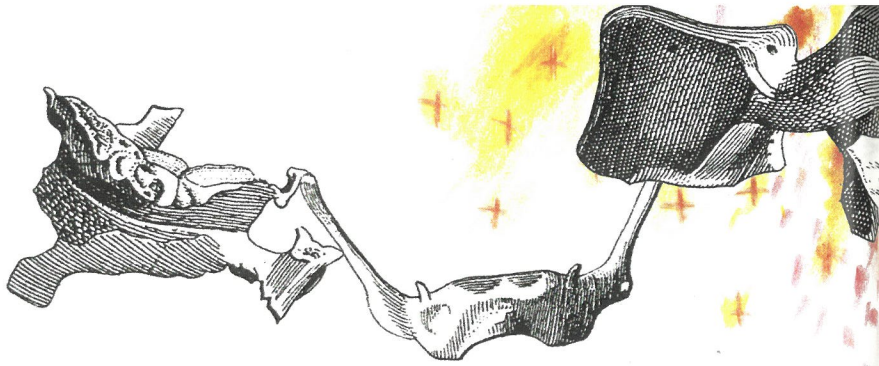
Digital artist Sam Smith's visions are dark and slick. He gives us a glimpse of ulterior worlds filled with strange experiments and clinical procedures. In ***Set Piece***, which has just finished exhibiting at the Perth Centre for Contemporary Art, a gawkish time-traveller traverses a series of mediated landscapes. He battles three evil forces that submit him to invasive electronic experiments. Sam's work combines video, sound art, installation and photography to create an evocative world of video-loop distortion and digital manipulation.

His eyes spark as he discusses the potential of the digital world: "You have this constructed landscape on the screen, it's the data-verse, a universe made up of bits and pixels that you can mold anyway you want."

"Hollywood uses digital technologies as a means to an end," he continues. "They don't want you to look at the screen and say 'well that's the computer generated element, that's the blue-screen element, there are this many layers and there's a matte painting in the background.' But why try to make it transparent? [These technologies are] such a part of film making and art making at the moment that it's interesting to inspect them, to make them subject instead of hiding them."

Sam will be speaking about his work at part one of the Artifact Series during the Res Artis ***festival in Sydney in August.*** Set Piece ***will be at Christchurch's HSP Gallery from September 21 until October 9.*** ELLA BARCLAY

More information on Sam's work can be found at
http://www.pneuma.net.au
http://www.theregistry.net.au



FILM

Whose Story?

Fahimeh's Story is an observational documentary about an Iranian woman who has escaped an unhappy marriage by fleeing to Australia. RACHEL MAHER spoke to the director about the challenges of representing a bi-cultural experience.

Faramarz K-Rahber insists his directorial debut is not an Iranian story. "I don't want to claim that this film or anybody appearing in the film represents a type of nationality, religion or lifestyle. This is Fahimeh's story." While essentially this is true — the film's narrative is carefully developed around the people and events in Fahimeh's unusual life — both subject and director do share an urge to express an Australian experience that has its roots strongly planted in Iran. Ironically, although the film is scored with Middle Eastern music, and the dialogue largely takes place in Farsi (Persian), *Fahimeh's Story* is an often bleak glimpse into what might be described as very ordinary Australian family life in suburban Brisbane.

Elements of Fahimeh's life are clearly not ordinary at all: her 10 year battle to divorce her husband and keep her children in Iran; failing this, her decision to finally flee her unhappy life with her kids to Australia; and, at 47 years of age (where the film begins) her unexpected marriage to 77 year old RSL member John.

The ensuing picture however, is perhaps a more common one, revealing the everyday experiences of a bi-cultural Australian household. While Fahimeh's energy appears unfailing, bitter verbal clashes with her teenage sons about her new husband pepper the narrative, and cultural differences inhibit her closeness to John even though he converts to Islam. *Fahimeh's Story* depicts the joy, exasperation, surprise and struggle that might comprise any Australian woman's adult experience.

What is engaging about this film is its careful rejection of racial and cultural stereotypes and its self-conscious representation not only of Fahimeh, but also her Iranian ex-husband, an older Australian bloke from Queensland, and her 'ethnic youth' sons. This is a tribute to the director's maturity and self-confessed wish to be "fair" to everyone in Fahimeh's life.

"I do identify with [Fahimeh's sons] Shamin and Shahab and with Fahimeh. But I also identify with John. I put myself in their shoes to see what they are thinking and feeling, so that I can tell their story," explains Faramarz. The true test to this approach came during filming, when the director discovered that Fahimeh had sponsored her Iranian ex-husband Hossain to come to Australia to visit her sons, and further, had not revealed to him that she had married John.

Faramarz remembers hearing the baffling news: "I was speechless. Why on earth would she do that? Wasn't he the reason she left Iran in the first place?"

Such an event might be relished by some documentary-makers as the perfect dramatic twist to a narrative, but Faramarz approached the news with a much greater sense of responsibility. Representing such an encounter could easily have resulted in a dangerous simplification of Islamic tradition, of the conflict between men and women or Eastern and Western lifestyles. While the central scene with Hossain does remain uncomfortable viewing, it is aided by Faramarz's earlier rendering of the depth of Hossain's character, and the fact that the director has not attempted to resolve or justify the traumas expressed. Importantly, the director's dexterity is sustained by the cultural knowledge, respect and empathy that he, being Iranian, brings to the story.

When Faramarz wanted "to present a story about life, love and family," the camera had full access and relentlessly captured the personal moments of Fahimeh's life. As a result *Fahimeh's Story* risks at times becoming a banal exercise in uncomfortable realism.

Fortunately, it also offers a complex portrait of a Muslim, Middle Eastern, Iranian woman living in Australia. This gives the film a unique strength. Rarely are we offered a story — particularly one that depicts 'ethnic' identity in contemporary Australia — from a director armed with both personal and cultural insight and the unmitigated trust of the subject. The film has appeared in the landscape at a time when Australian society lies in the grip of cultural crises over race, identity and particularly the representation of Muslim and Middle Eastern people in the public realm. In this context *Fahimeh's Story* is also Faramarz's story — one about understanding the universal experiences that transcend cultural and racial difference.

Fahimeh's Story *screens at the* Brisbane International Film Festival *in August.*

Film on Screen

AUGUST

MELBOURNE INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL
Where? Melbourne, VIC
When? July 21–August 8
Web http://www.melbournefilmfestival.com.au

BRISBANE INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL
Where? Brisbane, QLD
When? July 27–August 8
Web http://www.biff.com.au

GOLD COAST FILM FANTASTIC
Where? Gold Coast, QLD
When? August 5–8
Web http://www.filmfantastic.com/2004

HIROSHIMA INTERNATIONAL ANIMATION FESTIVAL
Where? Hiroshima, JAPAN
When? August 19–23
Web http://www.urban.ne.jp/home/hiroanim

SEPTEMBER

RIVER CITY SHORT FILM FESTIVAL
Where? Wanganui, NEW ZEALAND
Date? September 3–4
Web http://www.film.wanganui.info

REELIFE SHORT FILM FESTIVAL
Where? Sydney, Melbourne and regional NSW
When? September 26–November 1
Web http://www.vibewire.net/reelife

OCTOBER

TOKYO INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL
Where? Tokyo, JAPAN
When? October 23–31
Web http://www.tiff-jp.net

FITZROY SHORTS
Where? Melbourne, VIC
When? First Wednesday of every month
Web http://www.fitzroyshorts.com

FILM

From Starewicz's *Frogland*

PROFILE

Wladislaw Starewicz, Maverick Genius of Stop-Motion

The work of Russian-born animator Wladislaw Starewicz has been largely overlooked in recent decades, which is surprising because he pioneered the use of stop-motion techniques in narrative-based film. He developed the method used today by the Bolex Brothers, Adam Elliot, the Brothers Quay, and many other animators such as Jan Svankmejer, who followed in his footsteps.

As a child Starewicz was artistic and did not take to formal education. His early interests in photography and entomology lead him to become the director of a museum of natural history, where he first documented live insects on film. After the cast of one of these films — a pair of nocturnal stag beetles — kept falling asleep under the stage lights, he decided to try animating them by employing a process he had seen used in a public service announcement by Emile Cohl, titled *The Animated Matches*. Starewicz recreated the beetles in a battle scene by attaching articulated limbs to two beetle carcasses with sealing wax. And so, the first stop-motion animated puppet tale was born.

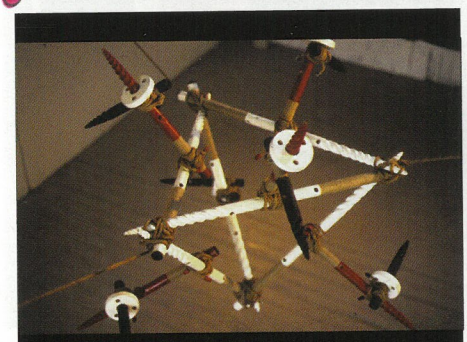
This method proved so effective and enjoyable for Starewicz that he continued, later bringing to life a menagerie of toys, puppets and dead animals in ways that remain technically astounding and captivatingly inventive. At the time, Starewicz's compellingly realistic animations mesmerised international audiences, with one British reviewer convinced that his insects were "trained by an unidentified Russian scientist".

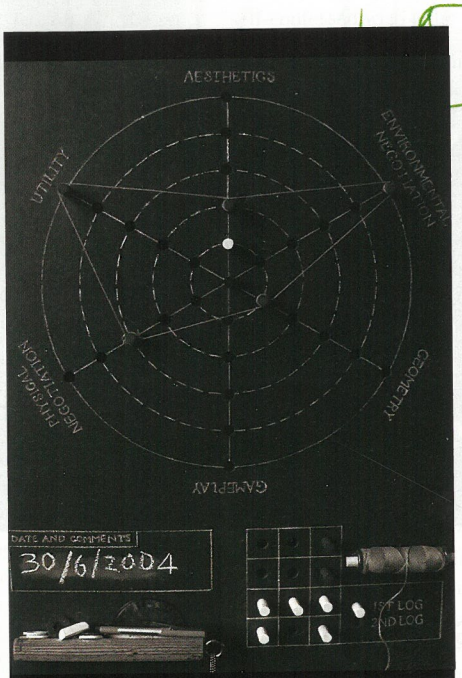
After fleeing the Russian Revolution Starewicz ended up establishing a studio in France, remaining independent despite lucrative offers to animate in Hollywood. He kept every puppet he ever made and often the stars of one film would turn up as extras in others down the track.

Starewicz produced almost one hundred films over more than fifty years until his death in 1965. They are evidence of the incredible influence that not only his technical mastery, but also his eccentric and sometimes macabre fairytale style, has had on subsequent generations of animators.
ADELE WILKES

VISUAL ARTS

Splint Mate





PHOTOS: THE SPLINT COLLECTIVE

LUCAS IHLEIN argues that 'interactive' arts practice means more than pressing buttons; and assembles a gammy billy-cart to prove his point.

Much has been made of recent advances in new media art — particularly the development of 'interactive' and 'immersive' environments and installations. Melbourne's Australian Centre for the Moving Image (ACMI) and its German sibling Zentrum für Kunst und Medientechnologie (ZKM) pride themselves on supporting artists who experiment with new ways of overwhelming our senses with sound and image. The public (so the marketing department tells us) is hungry to see futuristic interfaces between human and machine. Yet how many of these artworks succeed in engaging museum visitors beyond 'press here and see what happens'? How often is it that a simple, old fashioned conversation is more rewardingly 'interactive' than the choose-your-own-adventure style new media works to which we are increasingly exposed?

Around the same time that ACMI launched its teched-up exhibition *2004: Australian Culture Now* in Federation Square, CLUBSproject inc, an artist-run venture above Melbourne's Builders Arms Hotel, presented *multipleMISCELLANEOU Salliances (mMa)*. Taking place in July, *mMa* was an ongoing series of "art conversations" taking the form of "collaborative events and activities … by and between people whose practices construct, explore, and enact multiple social relations". The most sophisticated items of 'new media' in *mMa* were video cameras and television sets — all of which have been more or less available as artists' tools since the early 1970s.

Among the myriad of old media projects at *mMa* was *Splint*, a kind of organic Meccano set made by Jason Maling and Torie Nimmervoll. Described as "the way of the stump and the strap", *Splint* is a toy/tool-kit, hand-made from wood, rope, and leather that deliberately comes without instructions or hints.

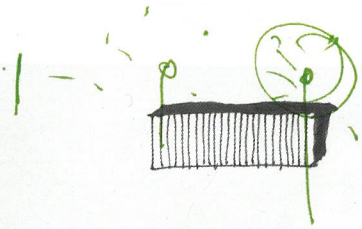
Maling and Nimmervoll rarely present *Splint* within an art gallery context, which they claim can restrict free play and participation (they prefer to work in schools or public places). Gallery visitors usually come with a tentative not-sure-if-I-can-touch inhibition, which they learn from the conventional presentation of art. *Splint*'s makers set arbitrary (and often silly) tasks for themselves and willing participants to carry out — usually within an urban context. For instance, "use the apparatus to scale a tall, sheer wall".

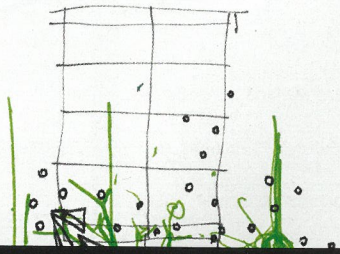
When I arrived at CLUBS my friend Damien was already sniffing around *Splint* — he was instinctively drawn to it, but wasn't sure exactly how to tackle its mysterious inventory of spare parts. The elements of the kit seem very much like found industrial tools for the engineering of a car. They look like something 'proper' — something extremely well made with a (hidden) intended purpose. The kit is divided up into 'cells' — each cell contains wooden disks, various lengths of rope, spiral-carved 'stumps' (much like medieval cricket stumps), and a leather harness and hexagonal mat. All are engineered to withstand the hammering they receive from enthusiastic users, and are often repairable when damaged or worn out.

Splint lends itself to — and almost demands — collaboration. Soon enough Damien and I were diving into the metal cases containing the stumps and rustic-smelling sisal rope, and attempting, in our uncritically-masculine way, to make our own 'billy-cart'. This playful, absorbing construction task kept us going for a few hours, and even when our makeshift vehicle ended up in the pits, with a tragically split chassis, Maling didn't chastise us — "I guess we'll retire that piece," he said with a shrug.

Cleverer than us were a duo of (also male) theatre designers who set about designing a comfy and functional chair out of the versatile kit. The dedicated pair, concerned not just with the use-value, but also the look of their piece of furniture, gave themselves the limitation of not using any knots. Such aesthetic concerns are very much a part of the *Splint* experience. The kit comes complete with a "self-assessment" system — a blackboard (pictured) upon which participants can rate their own progress — using criteria like "environmental negotiation, utility, gameplay, geometry, physical negotiation, and aesthetics". And Maling and Nimmervoll have kept a log of results at regular intervals during the evolving life of *Splint*.

One of the most important products of *Splint* is also one of the most intangible: the collaborative





relationship which stealthily develops between the two or more 'players' as they work on a common task. This was evident in the knotted brows of the chair-makers as they quietly tackled problem after problem with the utility of their ad-hoc furniture, while not wanting to sacrifice the aesthetic decision to avoid knots. *Splint* is thus a tool for learning, not only about physical construction, but also about how to negotiate joint decision-making in a (self-determined) task. This educational aspect renders the kit ideal for workshops with children — and watching them work with the elements of *Splint* helps Maling and Nimmervoll improve its materials and design in a constant process of evolution.

When I returned to CLUBS a few days later, I found our billy-cart had been recycled by subsequent participants into a harness and rope ladder for scaling the exterior wall of the Builders' Arms Hotel — a *MacGyver*-style emergency exit system from the bustlingly sociable art venue.

Each time I visited *mMa* it was jam-packed and chaotic. Groups of artists seemed to be cooking up projects in every corner, and newcomers were warmly welcomed to join in. Soup was doled up as you walked in the door, and free tea and coffee were available. These humble, hospitable gestures may seem minor, but I don't doubt that they were as thoroughly discussed and orchestrated as any of the other rich and interactive elements of *mMa*.

LUCAS IHLEIN IS AN ARTISTS WHO KEEPS A BLOG, WHERE HE COLLECTS NOTES ABOUT ART PROJECTS INVOLVING EXCHANGE.
http://bilateral.blog-city.com

mMa was organised by Bianca Hester as a part of *Resistance Through Rituals*, coordinated by Lisa Kelly at Westspace.
http://www.westspace.org.au/projects/resistance.htm
CLUBSproject inc http://www.clubsproject.org.au
Splint http://www.splint.info

Emerging Brisbane

This year has seen the publication of two new collections that document emerging Brisbane culture: *Between Space*, an anthology of experimental Queensland writing, and *Summer*, a catalogue of Brisbane visual arts. Both projects 'emerged' from the cultural ferment associated with last year's *Straight Out of Brisbane* festival, which will be happening for the third time this December in and around Brisbane's inner-city suburb of Fortitude Valley.

Between Space, edited by Ben Doran and Gerald Roche, is an attractively designed chapbook attempting a literary version of remixing. Each contributor willingly offered their work up to a collaborator, who had the chance to completely re-work and re-write the submission. The result is a riotous exercise in literary cut 'n' paste, spanning experimental fiction, conceptual art, comics and visual storytelling.

Summer is an ambitious survey of new Brisbane visual art at a time when the city's vibrant visual arts scene is drawing renewed national interest. Compiled and curated by Amanda Cuyler and Sally Brand, the publication includes a broad representation of the exciting new talents such as Tim Plaisted, Rachel Haynes, Jacqui Vial, Sebastian Moody, Wilkins Hill, Miranda Williams, and more.

All up, it's an exciting time for emerging arts in Brisbane — even if well-paid arts bureaucrats continue to fund large buildings while working artists struggle. BEN ELTHAM

Between Space can be purchased through *Straight Out of Brisbane*, contact ben.d@straightoutofbrisbane.com

Summer can be purchased through The Farm Space gallery in Brisbane, go to http://www.thefarmspace.com

PROFILE: ART SPACE: Live Home 3, Guangzhou, China.

Every bottle of Pearl River Bridge Soy Sauce pictures the famous iron girder bridge that first spanned the Zhujiang River in Guangzhou at Haizhi Square. From downtown Hong Kong to Guangzhou's East Railway station takes only one and a half hours by fast train, but you arrive in a truly different world — modern, urban China. A city of several million plus the same in migrant workers; a city with a two thousand year history and, simultaneously, a neon Bladerunner skyscape.

While the bridge is at the eastern end of the best strip of bars and clubs this side of a night in Mongkok, there is an entirely different scene a short ride away on Er Sha Dao (Two Sands Island).

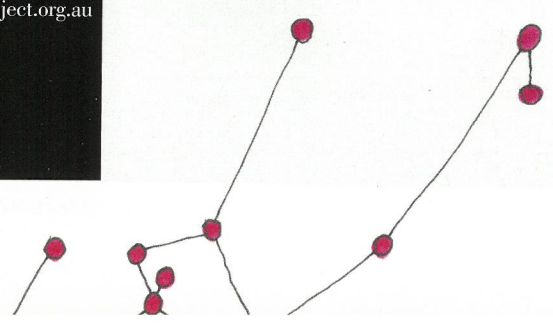
Between the Xinghai Concert Hall and Guangdong Museum of Art, site of the May *Open Attitude* exhibition of local up-and-coming artists, lies one centre of south China's emerging independent art and music scene. Live Home 3 is the itinerant artspace, bar, band venue and lovechild of a group of artists and musicians including rockgod Wang Lei, best known outside the scene for his starring role in sex-columnist Mu Zimei's online diary a year ago.

Says Live Home 3: "This is not the Rive Gauche of River Seine. This is the Rive Droite of River Pearl. The mission: to re-create the correlation between art and the city we're living in. We expose art by invading pubs and restaurants. We're launching a guerrilla on art. We're making use of all the useful space."

Live Home 3 is currently in the middle of a month-long music festival, including a week of hip hop, tours by Shanshui Records and Panda Twin from Beijing, and finishing off with the now annual French music festival.

As soon as the music finishes, *A Discrimination* begins. *A Discrimination* is a group exhibition of art and design from around Guangdong. Among the artists are Liu Zhongqing and Guo Dong, a Shenzhen computer and performance artist known for his recent video *Shit Age*. FRANCES D'ATH.

http://www.livehome3.com



Right of Way

GREGORY MACKAY

Who writes these dumb racist slogans out here?
ARABS
If they want to have any impact, why aren't they written on the front of the house?
Cowards.
DIR
I guess they're afraid.

Afraid that familiar things will change?
Long queues at the petrol station, the toxic food.
The sport and booze.
The TV.
What are they really afraid of?

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DISCURIO

Miss Galaxy, Tonga.

ILLUSTRATION: TIN NGUYEN

In a country where scanty clothing and open displays of sexuality are widely considered unacceptable, a transvestite beauty pageant is one of the most popular annual events. MIRANDA TETLOW introduces Miss Galaxy…

In accordance with social customs, I packed my bags for a year of volunteer work in the Pacific's last kingdom by dutifully discarding sleeveless tops and skirts that brazenly revealed my knees. Contrary to Western myths about the sexually licentious Pacific, Tonga has a deeply religious population and traditions of respect, rank and hierarchy that go back centuries. The list of Tongan taboos is lengthy and unavoidable, ranging from language and protocol used in the presence of the royal family, to sexual mores. In fact the word taboo is actually derived from the Tongan word *tapu*. We can probably thank Captain Cook's voyages in the Pacific for this gift to the English language, but in any event, the word's origins are widely recognised by etymologists. The notion of *tapu* is central in contemporary Tongan culture. Custom and law prohibit certain acts and behaviours, while others are frowned upon heavily and contravention will attract the spirited force of village gossip.

Yet one of the most popular events in the Tongan year is ***Miss Galaxy***, a beauty pageant staged by the ***fakaleiti***, the local transvestite community. I was intrigued. In a country where brothers and sisters traditionally sleep in different houses, where affection in public is offensive and scenes involving kissing or sex are blacked out by the local television network, I was surprised that one of the country's most popular annual event would involve the ***fakaleiti*** sporting faux fur hot pants and high heels onstage for the best part of three days.

Traditional Tongan *houma* feast.

PHOTO: MIRANDA TETLOW

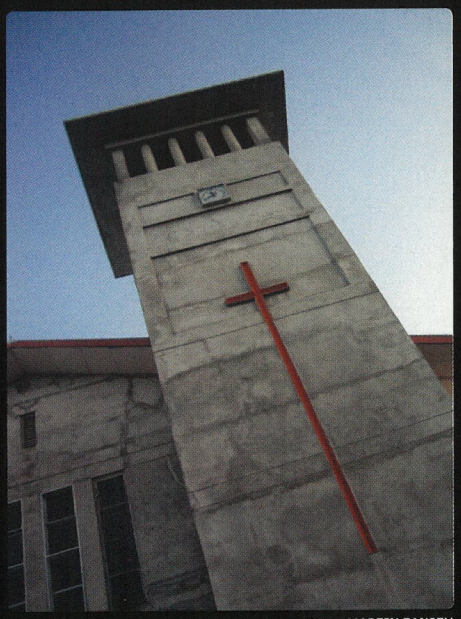


PHOTO: MARTIN TANSEY

I encountered Tonga's thriving ***fakaleiti*** scene when I first arrived on the main island. Anxious to join a sporting team in order to keep the effects of ***sipi*** (greasy mutton flaps) and ***kapa pulu*** (tinned corned beef) at bay, a few lively souls pointed me towards the netball fields where the ***fakaleiti*** team practise diligently three to four times a week. Winners of the Gold Medal at the 2001 ***Gay Games*** in Sydney, they deliberated on whether I had anything to offer their current competition against the local girls' South Pacific Games team, but finally Saskia, with a frangipani behind her ear, declared that I was allowed to stay. As I made my way out onto the field for the first quarter, my opponent Sione (Tongan for 'John') offered me a hibiscus flower for my hair and extended a long, manicured hand of welcome. In a country where someone riding a bicycle through the village is an event, the regular ***fakaleiti*** netball games were quite spectacular and usually attracted a small crowd who cheered enthusiastically.

Watching interactions between the Tongan community and the ***fakaleiti*** was particularly interesting on the outer islands. 'Eua, for example, has a population of approximately 5000 people, and if the capital Nuku'alofa seems to amble at the slow pace of *taimi faka-tonga* (Tongan time), this island is at a standstill. Notwithstanding, Maxi's Disco is the place to be on a Saturday night in 'Eua, particularly if you have a penchant for socials in town halls and Under 18 Rugby teams who have imbibed a homebrew or three each. I was sitting on one of the benches inside when two young ***fakaleiti*** in halter neck tops, tight jeans with slits to the thigh and platform shoes sashayed onto the dance floor. The Under 18 Rugby team couldn't believe their luck. They began slow dancing with the girls and I watched agape, suddenly realising that unlike small town Australia, conservative Tonga hadn't degenerated to violent fights and homophobic slinging matches. The romance on the dance floor was only interrupted at midnight when all shops, businesses and night clubs compulsorily shut in preparation for the Sabbath.

These initial experiences were an interesting taste of things to come during July, the month for all things beauty pageant related, including ***Miss Galaxy***. This is peak tourism time for Tonga, coinciding with Heilala week. The beauty pageant queen, Miss Heilala, is always crowned by King Taufa'ahau IV's birthday on July 4. Potential candidates for Miss Heilala must make ***ngatu*** (tapa cloth made from mulberry bark); perform the ***tau'olunga*** (traditional Tongan dance); and display the charms and soft roundness associated with Tongan beauty in the talent section and during their required attendance at the King's Church on the Sunday prior to judging. The swimsuit section is noticeably absent, although ***tau'olunga*** does involve the girls oiling their skin in order for the public to slap dollar bills on them as a sign of appreciation.

The ***Miss Galaxy*** competition unquestionably draws its inspiration from Miss Heilala and like-minded beauty contests around the world, and combines their essential elements with satire, self-deprecation and home made glamour. The event usually sells out and audience members crowd into Queen Salote Memorial Hall, the country's largest indoor venue.

Miss Galaxy always opens with a prayer from a local church minister, while President of the Tonga Leiti Association, Joey Mataele, gives a welcoming speech including pre-emptive apologies to the royal guests of honour for any offensive behaviour to come. The gauntlet is then thrown for three nights of "own costume design", formal wear and talent quests. Contestants spend months rehearsing, obtaining sponsorship and fashioning clothes out of materials as diverse as plastic straws and tulle netting.

In 2003, the fashion extravaganza ran along an international theme, with outfits ranging from a sultry, shimmering Cleopatra number to Miss Trinidad and Tobago, whose Carnevale inspired bird costume projected feathers that nearly knocked the roof off the stage. Contestants demonstrated talents ranging from ***tau'olunga*** to pole dancing, and expounded upon their hobbies. Vanessa liked "reading, going to nightclubs and modelling with the boys" and Uve's "main interest is policemen", while Sonia said that her favourite song was 'Who let the dogs out?' Miss Galaxy certainly gives a unique insight into Tongan music tastes — audience members were also treated to UB40 and 50 Cent's 'In

The *Fakaleiti* Aerobics Team.

PHOTO: MIRANDA TETLOW

Bird of Paradise.

PHOTO: ALBERT TIONG

Miss Galaxy contestant Vanessa likes "reading, going to nightclubs and modelling with the boys" and Uve's "main interest is policemen".

da club' — veritable Pacific anthems which can be heard blasting out of tinny car radios or nightclub dance floors on any given evening, usually followed by Eminem. Much of the evening's entertainment proved to be inaudible as the audience cheered and screamed with laughter as participants 'lost' costumes, engaged in crotch-rubbing dance displays and caressed the buff, bronzed men who agreed to perform alongside them.

Unfortunately, the reception has not always been this warm. Rising panic in the Pacific over HIV/AIDS led to finger pointing at the ***fakaleiti*** community by church ministers and other community elders. In a population where the number of self-professed atheists could be counted on one hand, church disapproval is devastating. In response, Joey Matele created the Miss Galaxy pageant in 1993, as part of a wider campaign to educate the community, address issues of discrimination and raise funds for the Tonga Leiti Associations' activities. The ***fakaleiti*** were assisted initially under Australian aid schemes and by delegates from Secretariat of the Pacific Community(SPC). They were defended most vociferously by Papiloa Foliaki, Tonga's first female parliamentarian. Joey explains, "AIDS was thought to be a gay transmitted disease, and we started to get blamed for it and told we were sinners. One particularly elderly minister said to Papiloa, 'I don't know why you support these children. [Homosexuality] is a sin, it's in the Bible.' She just turned around and said, 'I don't know which Bible you're reading.' After that the controversy mellowed out." Joey laughs, and turns away to light a cigarette. "I usually try and stay away from politics, but I think it's in our genes."

The transformation of Miss Galaxy from blasphemy to entertainment must also be partially attributed to Joey herself, a high profile campaigner with strong connections to Tonga's always influential royal family. Her grandmother was brought up by Queen Salote, and Joey remembers that she grew up as virtually "a living doll for Princess Pilolevu". "My brother was a little difficult at times, but I think he was just trying to scare me. My family has always been a huge source of support for my work." She continues, "I think I was born with it, I don't really remember deciding whether I was a ***leiti*** or not. … On my first birthday I had a can-can dress and a corsage, with long and curly hair. … Even my father said that they always noticed something different about me, but just left it at that." However, Joey admits it is not the same for all ***fakaleiti***, particularly in outer islands or villages. At times, some have experienced harassment, exclusion from the community and physical or sexual assault.

Overall though, these days the flamboyance associated with the ***fakaleiti*** seems to earn them a grudging respect, even from more conservative elements of the population. This version of tolerance is not accorded to gay men or lesbians. Joey notes that lesbians "don't really come out in public, they don't mix around with us. They keep to themselves. [Based on a] few comments I have heard, I think Tongan people would rather see the ***leiti***. They can make an excuse for that, but not for the lesbians. I guess it's because of our culture."

Tongan culture is certainly rife with contradiction. Virginity is sacred, yet explicit jokes abound, even on occasions like funerals. The ***fakaleiti*** enjoy a high profile in the Tongan community but lesbianism exists only in rumours and whispered gossip. Homosexuality is not illegal, but it is against the law to walk around in public without a shirt on. Like most societies, some taboos are enforced by legal sanctions, others are entrenched by community reaction. Acceptance of Tonga's transgender community is no doubt also assisted by the fact that no ***fakaleiti*** have been included in the nation's eight reported cases of HIV.

Miss Galaxy is an event, an eye opener and a favourite amongst a community who love performance and visual story telling. It's also illustrative that sexual diversity can be embraced, but like in any culture, there are strings attached.

MIRANDA TETLOW IS A FREELANCE WRITER AND COMMUNITY RADIO PRESENTER CURRENTLY WRITING HER THESIS ON POLYNESIAN LITERATURE.

PHOTO: SANDY SCHELTEMA

In her role as Executive Officer of the Gundjehmi Aboriginal Corporation Jacqui Katona was a charismatic spokesperson for the successful campaign against the Jabiluka uranium mine in Kakadu National Park. Gundjehmi is the representative body for the Mirrar clan; Jacqui's people are also from Kakadu. Jacqui is currently studying a Bachelor of Arts in Human Geography at Macquarie University in Queensland. She spoke to EVE VINCENT about Aboriginal political futures, in the wake of the attack on, and subsequent scrapping of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC).

What's your response to the dismantling of ATSIC?

The government has an obligation to address Aboriginal disadvantage. Successive governments have committed themselves to funding programs that assist Aboriginal people to achieve the same quality of life as the average Australian. But, all governments are resistant to Aboriginal people expending those funds, delivering those services and organising, politically. … So, [ATSIC's demise] was inevitable.

This leaves the question: what is going to become of those Aboriginal organisations that were receiving funding? It's going to be difficult for those organisations to continue to do the hard work that they're doing at the coalface in Aboriginal communities.

[The main issue however] is not as much about funding as rules: who has the right to make those rules, and who has the right to determine if those rules have been followed properly? This has been the fundamental problem in Aboriginal affairs, that successive governments will not recognise Aboriginal people's right to make decisions about our future *collectively*. The government is more likely to approve of Aboriginal individuals making decisions: that fits into an assimilation-ist framework. But the government continues to put up barriers to Aboriginal people achieving self-determination.

Where does this leave Aboriginal political leaders and the Aboriginal political community?

What Aboriginal political leaders?

One of the [consequences] of engagement with the Federal Government has meant that Aboriginal people have been on the government payroll. They have been identified by the *government* as leaders.

So the emergence of leadership can only really take place now, outside of the government's agenda. And I think Aboriginal people have been waiting for some time for the emergence of political leadership. People like myself have worked on specific issues in specific communities, and have no ability to speak on behalf of all Aboriginal people. But this is something that Aboriginal people now have to wrestle with, to figure out how political engagement is going to take place, with Aboriginal people as distinct from the government, rather than paid by the government and therefore subject to the government's interests.

So is that potentially exciting; that we can now watch for the emergence of new voices and visions?

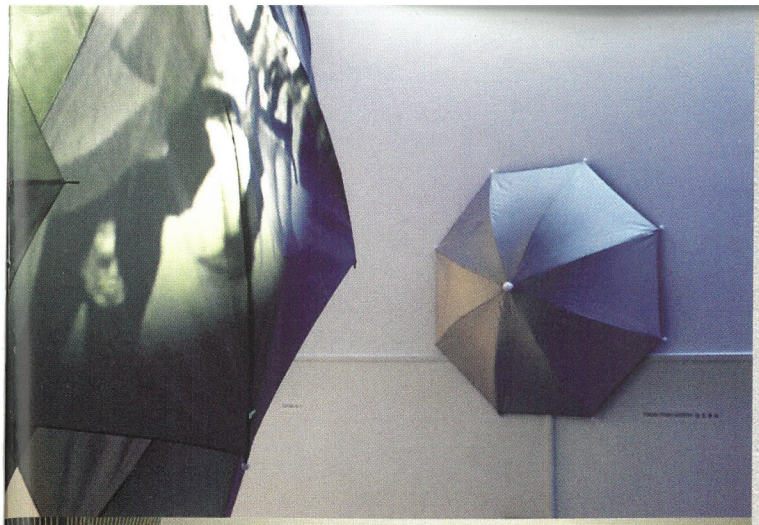
It'd be exciting if you were watching it, but if you're actually doing it, it's bloody hard work. And there's a lot of people who are not in the best financial position, and people who've been fighting for years and years. So how that emergence takes place, I don't know. But I'd like to think it will be dynamic, and I'd like to contribute in any way possible to making it dynamic.

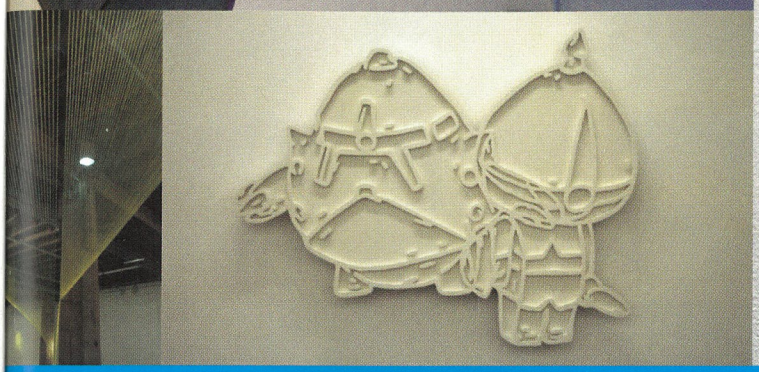
I think [first] the community has to recover. I think people have to self-organise to work out what the ramifications are, on a day-to-day basis, with the problem of funding. And then make collective decisions as small groups to work out how to address things, and what's to come. Certainly groups that are able to create leverage with governments and improve their negotiating position with the government will set standards nation-wide. And that may be how it's going to start.

What about options for economic sustainability? The Mirrar people have outlined their plans for the sustainable future of Jabiru (the service town in Kakadu) following the de-commissioning of the Ranger Uranium mine. Will post-mining Jabiru become a model to which other Aboriginal communities look?

I think communities where mining has been a dominant part of the economy would do well to look to a post-mining Jabiru. But in Jabiru it's still not clear whether the Northern Territory Government or the Commonwealth Government's agenda is to support the sustainability of Jabiru. And until they make that public we won't know whether their plans infringe on or enhance the rights of Aboriginal people. Obviously we hope that they enhance, especially with reference to the Northern Territory Land Rights Act. But other communities aren't so lucky as to have a legal act that they can fight over.

Ultimately it's up to people to become critically informed about the specific economics that operate in their region, and to develop strategies as to how Aboriginal people can engage more effectively with the economy. And to push governments to accommodate our engagement with the economy. That's one of the gaps I think, with the [Noel] Pearson plan: there's no push for accommodation by governments of Aboriginal people in the economy. It's a kind of tacked-on type of economic vision, rather than one where governments actually have to give something up to Aboriginal people.





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pvi collective, *panoptic: taipei*, 2003. Umbrellas, video projection and sound installation. Dimensions variable. Courtesy and © the artists. Photographs by Hsu Ta Yang - Sangeeta Sandrasegar, *Goddess of Flowers 30*, 2003. Paper, pins. 30 x 42 cm. Collection Isabella Dickson, Sydney. © the artist. Photograph by Sue Blackburn - Neal Smith, *YMS-15+MSM-04*, 2002. Acrylic on MDF. 90 x 80 cm. Private collection. © the artist - Sandra Selig, *frequency* (detail), 2002. Polyester sewing thread, nails. 2 spans, each 1100 x 300 cm (variable). Courtesy of the artist and Bellas Milani Gallery, Brisbane. © the artist

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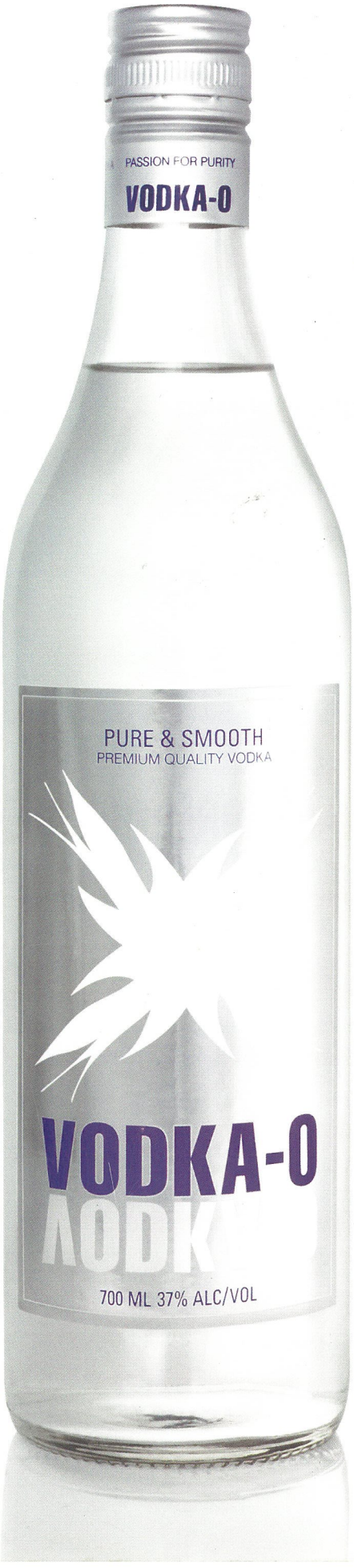

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